



# TIGER RAG

MAY 2026 • VOLUME 49, ISSUE 5



**BASEBALL  
BOTTOMS OUT**

# 10 AGAIN

KAILIN CHIO BECOMES 1ST TIGER TO SCORE A 10  
AT THE NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS - BUT LSU FALLS SHORT

**WILL WADE RETURNS**

BUT STARTS SLOW IN PORTAL

**LANE KIFFIN'S SPRING**

SAM LEAVITT'S OUT, BUT OFFENSE CLICKS

THE BIBLE OF LSU SPORTS

# GEAUX TIGERS



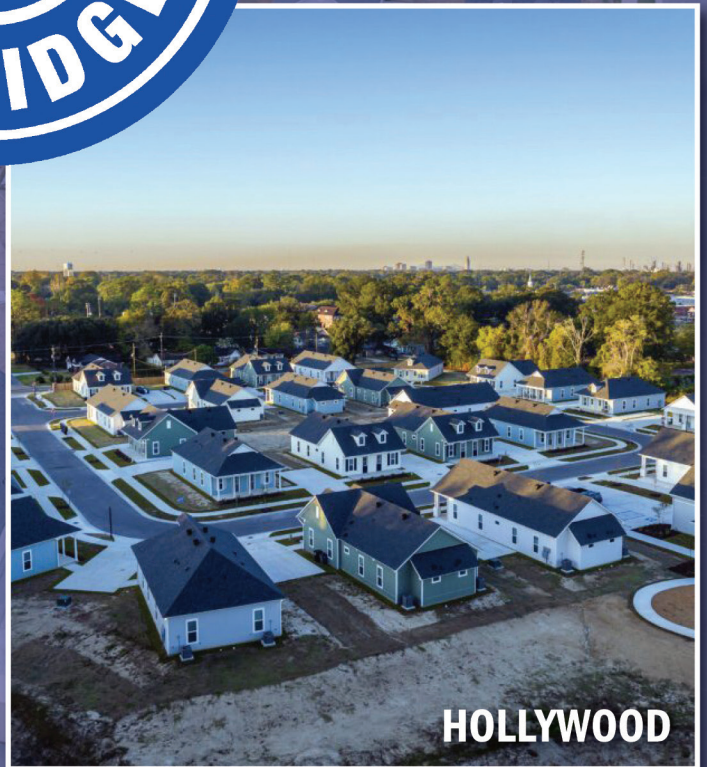
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COVER 2, PAGE 3

# Tiger of the Month

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Konnor McClain. Photo by: LSU Athletics

## Konnor McClain

The arena fell silent as **Konnor McClain** approached the vault runway in April 2026, her right arm wrapped in purple kinesiology tape. Three weeks earlier, spectators had watched her crumple to the mat at Baton Rouge Regionals, her face contorted in pain. Doctors had advised six weeks' rest; McClain gave herself six days.

At Fort Worth's **NCAA National Championship**, she inhaled deeply, sprinted forward, and launched herself skyward. Her landing—both feet planted without a step—drew roars from the LSU section: **9.8875**. Later, hanging from the uneven bars despite wincing during warm-ups, she executed a flawless dismount for **9.9500**. But it was the balance beam that cemented her legend. After her teammate's fall left chalk dust hanging in the spotlight, McClain mounted the four-inch width, steadied her trembling hands, and delivered the **9.9500** that kept the Tigers' title hopes intact.

The junior who whispered "average is amazing" before each routine is our **\*\*Tiger of the Month\*\***. 

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ON THE COVER:

Kailin Chio makes history for LSU at Nationals.



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LSU star outfielder **Jake Brown** lost for the season with wrist injury. Photo by: LSU Athletics



**Glenn Guilbeau**  
*Tiger Rag Editor*

Perhaps no SEC Storied documentary is more accurately titled than the recently released one about former LSU gymnastics coaching legend D-D Breaux.

“The Fighting Tiger” wonderfully details how Breaux fought with LSU’s athletic department over the decades to keep the program from being killed after LSU athletic director Carl Maddox (1968-78) hired her in 1977 to start the sport at LSU in 1978.

“Then everything changed when Skip Bertman became athletic director,” Breaux told Tiger Rag. “Before that, the LSU athletic department had made the decision twice to get rid of the program. I was very pleased with the documentary. It told a true timeline. It caught the essence of me – just a small town girl from Donaldsonville.”

Her mother got her a balance beam when she was a child, and she became one of the nation’s top gymnasts at Southeastern Louisiana.

“My mother was my Title IX,” she says in the documentary.

Among those interviewed are former LSU gymnast Livvy Dunne, whom Breaux signed, women’s basketball coach Kim Mulkey, former LSU football coach Nick Saban and Bertman.

“She was one of the most well-liked people in the athletic department,” Saban says.

“I have tremendous admiration for D-D,” says Bertman, who faced some of the same athletic department hurdles while turning LSU from a minor sport into a dynasty.

“D-D was victimized, and there really is no other word. Yet she survived,” Bertman says. “She had wonderful abilities as a coach and motivator.”

Breaux finally had enough with how gymnastics was being treated by the 1990s.

“There was no regard for the safety and well-being of our athletes,” she says. “So many inequities. It was awful.”

The gymnastics team practiced in a corner of the fieldhouse with a set of dismount bars attached to a wall that clearly was dangerous.

Breaux explained some of these issues in a letter to one of LSU’s athletic directors.

### There Has Never Been A “Fighting Tiger” Like D-D Breaux As SEC Storied Documentary Shows

“One of the darkest, worst memories I have,” she says of an assistant athletic director storming into her office. “He took the letter, crumpled it up, and threw it in my shirt. I’m like, ‘I can’t believe you just did that.’”

The documentary explores former LSU athletic director Joe Dean’s infamous quote in which he said he was going to start women’s soccer instead of reviving softball because he thought the “soccer girls looked cute in shorts.”

“He said that,” Breaux says. “And I was like, ‘Oh, we’re done.’”

But LSU women’s softball and soccer both came back, and Dean was eventually done as Bertman replaced him in 2001. And Breaux was just getting started.

LSU gymnastics soon began to thrive under Breaux as a national power with fifth place national finishes in 2008 and ’13, a third in 2014 and three national runner-up finishes in 2016, ’17 and ’19. She also won three of her four SEC titles from 2017-19. Miraculously, Breaux won her first SEC title in just her fourth year in 1981 with the budget and facilities of an intramural sport.

Then four years after her retirement, her hand-picked replacement, Jay Clark, won LSU’s first gymnastics national title in 2024.

“D-D is in that generation of female coaches who fought so hard,” Mulkey says.

She was and is a “Fighting Tiger.”

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](mailto:glenn@tigerrag.com).

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# Media Criticism Of Will Wade’s Slow Start In Portal Criticized, But Also Supported

By Glenn Guilbeau, Tiger Rag Editor

New LSU men’s basketball coach Will Wade sounded like there was about to be a hurricane of portal players coming to LSU at his introductory press conference at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center on March 30.

But that turned into an April Fool’s joke as Wade had only one transfer as of April 21 in No. 8 small forward Mouhamad Dioubate of Kentucky with as many as 14 more to go through the summer.

On April 15 the normally, mostly supportive 104.5 FM in Baton Rouge, which has a business partnership with LSU,

actually tweeted this on its @1045espn handle - “We’re WADING” with Wade’s No. 77 portal ranking and “8 Outgoing, 0 Incoming.”

Tiger Rag had a story on April 16 under a headline asking, “Has LSU’s New Coach Changed His Name To Will Wait?”

All in fun. Everyone knew Wade would eventually get players. Right? Wrong. Some were upset by the factual reporting.

“As I’ve said before, you are a fiction writer masquerading as a journalist,” tweeted @DCB\_LSU on April 16.

“Hopefully, they pull your credentials.”

But @GMoo27429137 tweeted, “Only an idiot would commit to play for his lying (expletive deleted),” in reference to Wade.

In truth, Wade finished with the No. 14 portal class last year at North Carolina State with eight. But he didn’t sign his first until 12 days after the portal opened and the second 17 days later. This year he signed his first 14 days after the portal opened. So, he was on schedule.

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**John Eads WAFB-TV**  
@JohnEadsWAFB

"We were built to win any type of game...and we're struggling with that right now"

The 2026 #LSU Baseball team is lacking in avenues to win games at the current moment.

Jay Johnson hopes the continued bullpen progression and improved offense can lead to a late-season push.



**Scott Rabalais**  
@RabalaisAdv

There she goes.  
There she goes again.  
Kailin Chio ... a perfect 10 on vault.  
All six judges gave her 10.0 marks.  
It's her 13th 10 this season and fifth on vault.  
What an amazing athlete.



**Kyle Tucker**  
@KyleTuckerCBB

RE: LSU's (publicly) empty roster ... upon tweeting about it, was immediately told "just watch."  
Apparently Will Wade is doing just fine out there in the portal.



**Lane Kiffin**  
@Lane\_Kiffin

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(Kiffin with former LSU offensive lineman Will Campbell)

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Flau'Jae Johnson  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



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This comprehensive Tiger Rag Tidbits report summarizes some of the headline-making events from the TigerRag.com archives for April 2026. From professional transitions and major championship runs to season-altering injuries and the dawn of new coaching eras, it has been a transformative month for LSU Athletics.

---

## Flau'jae Johnson: From National Champion to WNBA First Rounder

The headline of the month belongs to Flau'jae Johnson, whose legendary career at LSU has officially transitioned to the professional stage. On April 13,

the WNBA Draft provided a whirlwind of emotions for the "Big 4." Johnson was initially selected 8th overall by the Golden State Valkyries, the league's new-

est expansion franchise. However, in a move that sent shockwaves through the draft room, she was traded to the Seattle Storm just 30 minutes later.

Johnson leaves Baton Rouge as one of the most decorated and versatile figures in program history. Beyond her on-court contributions to the 2023 National Championship team, her impact on the university's brand was unparalleled. Her final collegiate season was capped off this week when she was named the Louisiana Player of the Year on the 2026 All-Louisiana women's basketball team. Johnson wasn't alone in the honors; teammates MiLaysia Fulwiley and Mikaylah Williams were also recognized, cementing Kim Mulkey's roster as the premier talent pool in the state.



Sam Burns.  
Photo by:  
Masters 2026

### Sam Burns Stuns at Augusta National in the Masters

In the world of professional golf, former LSU standout Sam Burns captured the attention of the sports world during the 2026 Masters. Burns, who has steadily climbed the world rankings since his time in Baton Rouge, looked poised to claim his first Green Jacket. He opened the tournament with a blistering 5-under 67, which placed him in a tie for the lead.

Though he slipped to second place following Rory McIlroy's historic second-round surge, Burns displayed immense composure over the weekend. He remained in the final pairings throughout the tournament, ultimately finishing in a tie for 2nd alongside fellow Baton Rouge native Patrick Reed. It marks the highest finish for a former Tiger in Masters history and signals that Burns is now a perennial contender on golf's biggest stages.

*Continued next page*



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LSU coach Lane Kiffin makes a point with redshirt freshman quarterback Husan Longstreet (#6) at a spring practice.  
Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi



## Baseball: A Season of Heartbreak and “What Ifs”

While the basketball and golf programs celebrated individual triumphs, the LSU Baseball program dealt with a series of catastrophic roster losses. Editor Glenn Guilbeau described the current state of the team as a “lost season” following a string of injuries to cornerstone players.

The most devastating news came on April 21, when it was confirmed that star outfielder Jake Brown is done for the season with a broken hamate bone

in his wrist. Brown was the engine of the Tigers’ offense, leading the team with 16 home runs and sitting comfortably on the Golden Spikes Award watch list. Because of his high draft stock, it is widely expected that Brown has played his last game in a purple and gold uniform.

This blow followed news from just 24 hours prior regarding the pitching staff. Weekend starter Cooper Moore was ruled out for the year due to a broken bone in his pitching arm. Moore is expected to return in 2027 under a medical redshirt, but for a team already struggling for consistency, losing

their ace and their best hitter in the same week has left Coach Jay Johnson with a massive rebuilding project for the remainder of the SEC slate.

---

## Lane Kiffin and the New Era of LSU Football

As spring football concludes, head coach Lane Kiffin has kept the momentum high in Baton Rouge. Following the 13th spring practice on April 21, Kiffin addressed the media to discuss the team’s progress. While

he praised the “competitive fire” of the roster, he was candid about the work remaining, particularly regarding the offensive line’s conditioning.

Kiffin’s impact on the recruiting trail remains his strongest asset. The program secured a massive win this month with the commitment of four-star athlete Braylon Calais. A Louisiana native, Calais’s pledge is a testament to Kiffin’s “lock the borders” strategy. In his commitment interview, Calais stated simply, “You can’t beat LSU,” marking the fourth major commitment for the 2027 cycle.

Additionally, the month provided much-needed closure regarding former quarterback Garrett Nussmeier. New medical data released from the NFL Combine revealed that his

2025 injury—which was previously diagnosed as an abdominal/oblique issue—actually originated from his spine. This revelation silenced critics who had questioned the severity of the injury during the previous season.

## Will Wade’s First Strike in the Portal

The return of Will Wade to LSU men’s basketball has officially entered the roster-building phase. After a quiet start to the transfer portal window, Wade landed a significant piece for the 2026-27 season: No. 8 ranked small forward Mouhamad Dioubate from Kentucky. Dioubate brings SEC-ready physicality and defensive versatility, representing the “type” of player Wade has historically used to find success in Baton Rouge.

## Olympic Sports Round-Up

- Women’s Tennis: The No. 15 Tigers reached the SEC Championship final, where they pushed No. 3 Auburn to the absolute limit. Despite a valiant effort, they fell 4-3 in a match that came down to the final set of the final court.
- Women’s Golf: Led by senior Taylor Riley, the Tigers finished 13th in the SEC Championship. Riley’s final-round performance, featuring four birdies on the back nine, provided a bright spot for the team as they look toward NCAA Regionals. **TR**

April 2026 has proven that while the faces in the jerseys and on the sidelines change, the drama and high stakes of LSU sports remain constant. For continued coverage of the baseball season’s recovery and the football team’s summer transition, stay tuned to TigerRag.com.



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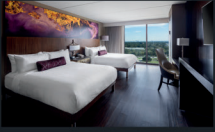
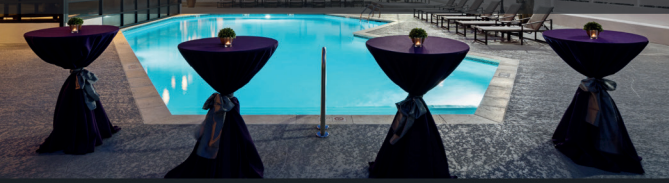
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## CALENDAR MAY 2026



### 5/13

HAPPY 34TH BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU DEFENSIVE BACK  
**TYRANN MATHIEU**



### 5/17

HAPPY 64TH BIRTHDAY  
TO LSU WOMEN'S  
BASKETBALL HEAD COACH  
**KIM MULKEY**



### 5/20

HAPPY 32ND BIRTHDAY  
TO FORMER LSU FOOTBALL  
OFFENSIVE LINEMAN  
**JOSH BOUTTE**



### 5/22

HAPPY 86TH BIRTHDAY TO THE  
LATE FORMER LSU WOMEN'S  
BASKETBALL COACH  
**SUE GUNTER**



### 5/23

HAPPY 88TH BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU BASEBALL  
HEAD COACH  
**SKIP BERTMAN**



### 5/25

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TO FORMER  
LSU BASEBALL PLAYER  
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Angel Reese.  
Photo by: Chicago Sky



# Angel Reese Takes Atlanta

Former LSU Great Traded From Struggling Chicago Sky  
Of The WNBA To A Possible Dream Team

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Former LSU women's basketball national champion forward and iconic star Angel Reese might be a contender again.

The "Bayou Barbie" of the Tigers' 2022-23 national championship team

has been traded from the downtrodden Chicago Sky to the contending Atlanta Dream in the WNBA.

Chicago will receive first round draft picks in 2027 and '28, while the Dream will get a second round pick in 2028.

Reese, who was the seventh player taken in the 2024 WNBA Draft by Chicago, has been on back-to-back Sky teams that cratered to last place finishes in the WNBA Eastern Conference at 10-34 in the 2025 season and 13-27 in 2024.

A two-time WNBA All-Star who is the only player in league history to average 12 rebounds a season twice, Reese expressed frustration about playing for the Chicago franchise last season.

“I’m beyond grateful for the opportunity to join the Atlanta Dream organization,” Reese told ESPN after the trade. “I’m focused on continuing to grow my game, competing at the highest level, connecting with fans and giving everything I’ve got to the Dream.”

LSU won its first national championship in basketball in 2023 behind Reese and second-year coach Kim Mulkey. The Tigers beat Iowa and superstar guard Caitlin Clark, aka “Ponytail Pete” as the Pistol Pete Maravich of women’s basketball, 102-85, in Dallas.

Reese scored 15 points with 10 rebounds and five assists and was named the Final Four MVP. LSU held Clark to 30 points and eight assists after she scored 41 in each of her two previous wins over Louisville and South Carolina to reach the championship.

Reese infamously put her ring finger in the face of Clark with the game still going on in the final moments, and a rivalry was born.

Since that game, though, Reese is 1-5 against Clark as Iowa and Clark beat LSU and Reese, 94-87, in the Elite Eight in the 2023-24 season to reach the Final Four.

Clark, who was the first pick of the 2024 WNBA Draft by Indiana, and Indiana were 4-1 against Reese and the Sky in two WNBA seasons.


Indiana finished 20-20 for third in the Eastern Conference and reached the WNBA playoffs in 2024 with Clark being named Rookie of the Year and first team All-WNBA. Indiana went 24-20 last season for third again and reached the playoffs, though Clark missed most of the season with injuries.

With more talent around her in Atlanta, Reese may now have a better chance against Clark and at reaching the playoffs for the first time in her WNBA career and make the Reese-Clark rivalry more competitive.

Atlanta won the Eastern Conference last season at 30-14 before losing in the first round of the playoffs.

Could the Pittsburgh Pirates be as kind to former LSU pitcher Paul Skenes – the first player taken in the 2023 MLB Draft - and trade him? Skenes has started two All-Star games and won the National League Cy Young last season, despite Pittsburgh finishing last in the NL Central in Skenes’ two seasons.

Reese will join Atlanta star guards Allisha Gray and Rhyne Howard.

“Angel is a dynamic talent and a perfect fit for what we are building in Atlanta,” Dream general manager Dan Padover said. “She has already proven herself as one of the most impactful players in the league. Her competitiveness, production and drive to win align seamlessly with our vision. This is an exciting moment for our organization and our fans.” 



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LSU football coach Lane Kiffin greets fans at an LSU Women's basketball game last season. Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



# Lane Kiffin Was Against The 9-Game SEC Schedule From The Beginning

## And Now, The SEC Championship Game Is Even More Of An Anachronism

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It may be time for Southeastern Conference commissioner Greg Sankey listens to Lane Kiffin ... or someone.

When talk of an increase to the SEC football schedule from eight league games to nine began roughly 10 years

ago, the SEC was in its prime as the king of college football.

Now, that the nine-game SEC schedule has finally been enacted for 2026, the SEC has been SEC-ond rate to the Big Ten in college football national champi-

onships since the 2023 season. Michigan, Ohio State and Indiana have won it all the last three seasons. And an SEC team didn't even make those final games.

The SEC's last national champion was Georgia in 2022 in the early stages of

Name, Image & Likeness and the no sit-out Transfer Portal.

The Big Ten has made more money than the SEC for decades through its television deals and because its schools have larger enrollments in bigger cities. Plus, in general, Big Ten schools tend to be better academically than SEC schools, which can lead to a richer and more successful donor base. So, member schools have more money to spend on rosters.

But the biggest reason the Big Ten has taken over may be because Nick Saban retired from Alabama after the 2023 season. He did win seven of the SEC's 14 national titles since 2003 (1 at LSU, 6 at Alabama) and six from 2009-20.

Even with the Big Ten winning the Big One three straight years, the SEC still likely has a higher number of good teams in its 16-team league than the Big Ten has among its 18.

Therefore, the SEC Championship Game has a tendency to hurt league members from reaching the title game, or wearing a team out if it does. The Big Ten's title games have not been as competitive as those in the SEC.

By the same token, the new nine-game SEC schedule will likely be tougher on SEC members than the Big Ten's nine-game schedule is on its teams.

That's what LSU coach Lane Kiffin thinks, and he tried to convince Sankey of this in various meetings along with presidents and athletic directors.

"That's not a good idea (nine SEC games) until how they select teams is fixed with automatic bids and when strength schedule matters how it should," Kiffin said recently.

"Until that's fixed, it makes zero sense to go add another hard game, put teams on the road five times in this conference, which top to bottom is the hardest conference with the hardest stadiums," he said. "I'm sure there were financial reasons for it, but I don't think that anybody now, after they've seen how selections have gone, thinks there's value in that."

In the end, it could be very difficult for SEC teams to get to 10-2 for a playoff spot.

"So, you just got some more losses," Kiffin said. "You made it harder? You don't get more points when you already have the hardest schedule."

The SEC survivors this season of the nine-game schedule then have to play the SEC title game. And already various SEC officials are saying the redundant SEC title game should end to help its member teams.

Kiffin's Ole Miss team last year was 13-1 before losing in the CFP semifinals.

Perhaps because it didn't play in the SEC Championship Game. Georgia did and lost to Ole Miss in the Sugar Bowl quarterfinal. And in 2024, Georgia played in the SEC title game, then lost in the Sugar Bowl.

"I think we looked as good as anybody at the end of last season going into the playoffs mentally and physically," Kiffin said.

The SEC may need to toss its "It just means more" slogan in favor of "Less is more." **TR**



Seimone Augustus  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



## LSU's Magical Run Of 3 Straight Final Fours Ends With Another 1st Round Loss As Seimone Augustus' Spectacular College Career Ends

*(Reprinted from the April 11, 2006, Tiger Rag Magazine)*

By MATT DEVILLE, Tiger Rag Editor

BOSTON — After outscoring its four NCAA Tournament opponents by 51 points in the second half, the LSU women's basketball team was not able to spark a second half comeback at the Final Four.

And the Tigers lost in the national semi-final for the third straight season, 64-45, to Duke on Sunday.

With the loss came the end of an era in LSU women's basketball.

Seimone Augustus, LSU's modern version of "Everyone's All-American," saw her collegiate career come to an end in a rare offensive struggle. Though her voluminous awards were nearly as amazing as her 2,702 career points, Augustus fell short of her goal of play-

ing for a national championship for the third time in a row.

Augustus was held scoreless in the first 22 minutes of play before finishing with 14 points on 6-of-18 shooting.

LSU center Sylvia Fowles finished with eight points and 13 rebounds as she was mostly ineffective against Duke's packed-in defense inside, like the rest of her teammates. Senior Florence Williams managed 10 points on 5-of-9 shooting and was the only LSU player who was better than 50 percent from the field.

Senior Scholanda Houston made only 2 of 13 shots for eight points and was 0-of-5 from three-point range.

LSU finished 31-4 after winning the SEC title at 13-1. Duke (31-3) advanced to face No. 2-seed Maryland in Tuesday's national championship game. The Terps defeated overall No. 1 seed North Carolina, 81-70, in the first national semifinal.

Duke held LSU to 18-of-62 shooting for 29 percent - the lowest field goal percentage in the 25-year history of the women's Final Four. LSU's 15-point total in the first half was a record low in the semifinals, breaking Purdue's mark of 17 also against Duke in 1999.

LSU made only 2 of 15 shots and turned it over seven times in the first 10 minutes of play and fell behind 18-4. Duke made 7-of-13 field goals to start the game, and it hit 50 percent of its field goals on 26-of-52 shooting, including a red hot 57.1 percent in the second half on 16-of-28 shooting.

Mistie Williams led four Blue Devils in double figures with 14 points while grabbing nine rebounds. All-American Monique Currie was held scoreless in the first half before finishing with 13 points.

Freshman guard Abby Waner had 11 points, and point guard Lindsey Harding added 10 points and dished out five assists. Though she only had seven points and five rebounds, Duke's 6-foot-8 center Alison Bales was a force inside as she blocked six shots.

Unable to generate any offense in the half court, the Lady Tigers again turned to their defense to score points. By holding Duke without a field goal for nearly six minutes, LSU crept back within five

points at 18-13 on a layup by Fowles with 3:05 left in the half.

However, a 17-foot jumper by Florence Williams was the only LSU field goal in the final 4:41 of the first half. Duke led LSU, 26-15, when Currie scored on a fast-break layup with 10 seconds left in the half.

Five Lady Tigers, including Augustus with her first basket of the game, scored in the first seven minutes of the second half to start a comeback.

LSU used a 16-7 run to get within six, 37-31, on a jumper by reserve guard RaShonta LeBlanc with 12 minutes to go.

Duke wasn't going to become the latest victim to another LSU rally, however. The Blue Devils answered with a 13-1 run of their own over the next four-plus minutes to earn a 51-33 lead.

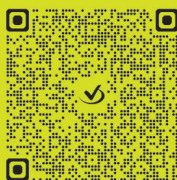
And Duke sent LSU and Augustus home short of their national championship goal. **TR**

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Will Wade  
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



**“Make No Mistake, I Wasn’t Born In Louisiana, But Louisiana Is Home”**

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

**N***ew LSU men's basketball coach – for a second time – Will Wade is back, make no mistake about that. The former fired coach by LSU on March 12, 2022, made a triumphant return with flames blazing, the band playing and the crowd roaring at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center at high noon on Monday, March 30.*

*Here are excerpts from his spine-tingling “press conference” that was really a pep rally as the public was invited and showed with nearly 1,000 in the arena.*

---

**WILL WADE:** Hey, look, very excited to be here. Great to see so many familiar faces. Great to have our students here, a lot of our alums, family, friends, supporters. This is deeply personal for me to be back here and to celebrate with all you guys here today. I can't even express in words what Dr. Wade Rouse (LSU president) and just the administration, everybody has meant to me. And I couldn't be more thrilled to be back with my wife Lauren and my daughter Caroline. My daughter is a little taller now.

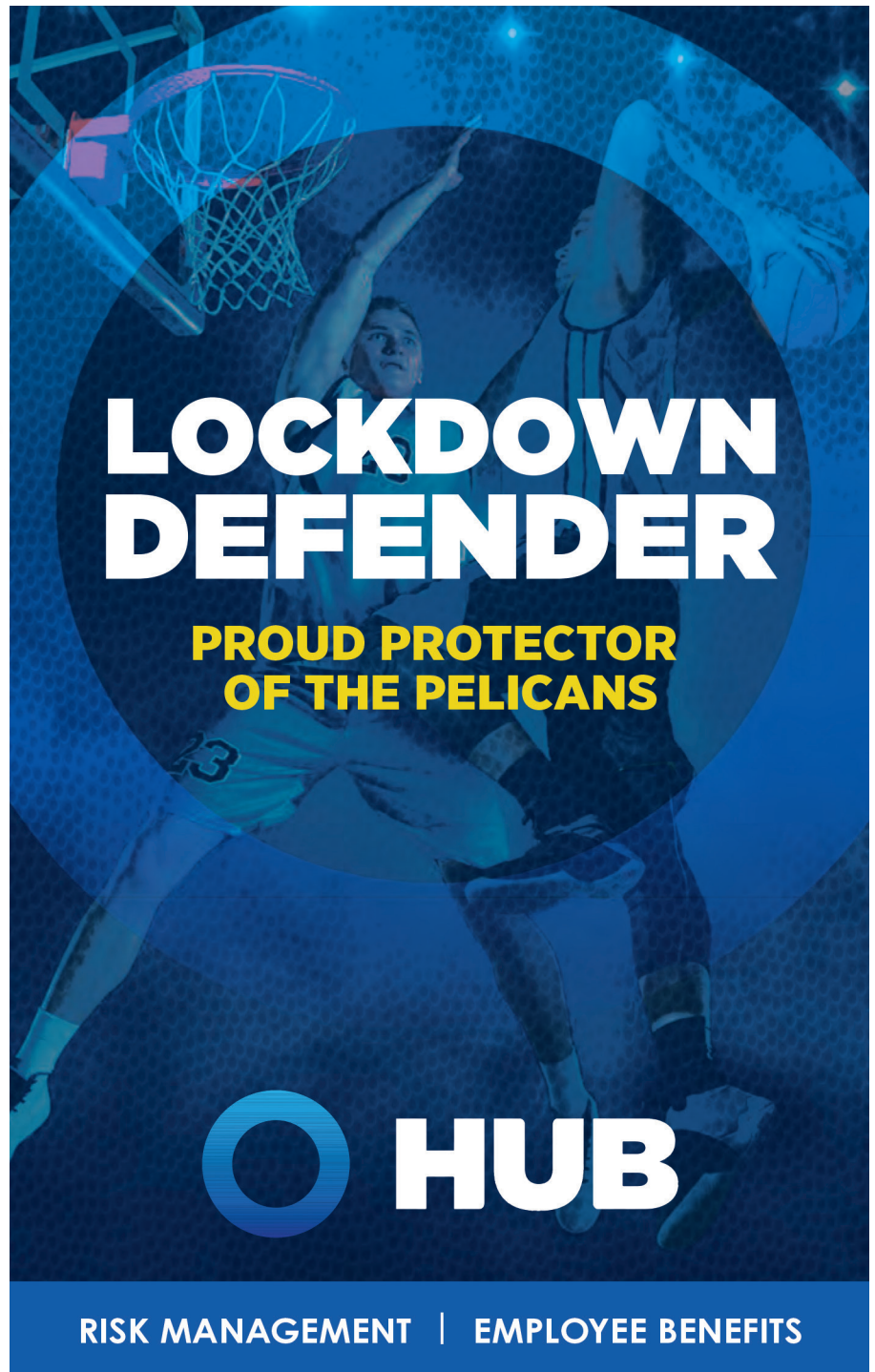
They've been the foundation through the highs and lows we've been through, that keep me smiling, keep me grounded, remind me of what matters in life. These two have sacrificed a ton for us to be here. I love you guys, and thank you so much for being here.

There are too many people to thank for making this happen. I want to, first off, thank our governor, Jeff Landry. I want to thank our wonderful LSU Board and our great chairman Lee Mallett. I want to thank Dr. Rouse, who I've worked with before (at McNeese State from

2023-25). We're going to work well together again, got that alignment. We've got Heath Schroyer (the then-McNeese State athletic director who hired Wade and was hired as LSU's deputy AD the same day Wade was hired on March 26) here. Same chain of command, as Doc (Rousse) likes to say, and certainly our wonderful athletic administration and everybody involved.


Their belief in me that this is the right time to come home will never be

forgotten. And make no mistake, this is home. I wasn't born in Louisiana, but Louisiana is home for me and my family. We're coming back to make history. We're going to make history one way or the other. We're coming back to try to hang a banner, win a national championship, or I'm going to be the first coach fired from the same school twice. But one way or another, we're going to make history. It's going to be a fun ride one way or the other. Ain't no doubt about that.



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Will Wade  
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



You're not getting the same coach you had four years ago. These last four years have humbled and changed me. You're getting a better coach, a better leader this time around. I've got the same urgency. I've got the same fight, same feisty guy that you've always known. But we're going to be better. I want everybody to know with LSU basketball, our time is now. I didn't come here to reflect and talk about the past and any of that stuff. I came here to win, and we're going to win immediately.

LSU and Louisiana deserve a winner, and that's what we're going to deliver. And we're going to deliver that in short order. Everybody has this notion like LSU basketball is meant to be average, mediocre or pretty good. You can throw that stuff out. That's not who we are. This program is meant to be great. This program is meant to compete at the highest levels night in and night out. As we say down here, it just means more.

That highly competitive winning program, I know what that program

looks like. I've seen it. I lived it. I know how to build it the right way. We're going to be rooted in aggression. We're going to be rooted in toughness. We're going to be rooted in discipline. We're going to recruit competitors that understand what it means to put those three letters across your chest. You won't find anybody that's more proud to wear that LSU and state of Louisiana than this guy right here. And we're going to find 15 players willing to lay it on the line for us every night.

Our first time here we had some top 10 offenses. But we were a little bit all over the place on defense. But now I know the formula, and we're going to have a top 10 offense and a top 10 defense, which will allow us to compete at the level that we want to compete at. Defensively, we're going to be disruptive, aggressive. Offensively, we're going to be relentless, attacking the paint, attacking the rim. We're going to have the details and discipline. We're going to build a winning program, and we're going to build this

thing quick. This is not something that's going to take long.

I remember this building when it was rocking. That Tennessee game the year we won the SEC (2019), I don't know if I've ever heard anything so loud in my life. The energy and the pride and how hard it is to play here when LSU basketball is right is unmatched anywhere in the country. And we're going to pack the PMAC every night. We're going to represent Louisiana the way it should be represented, with toughness, grit, and a lot of swagger, because that's what we have down here. We don't do anything halfway in this state.

I know we've taken some hits. I know people have been talking about us a little bit. I understand, I'm not for everybody, and we understand also that LSU isn't for everybody. But one thing we both understand is I'm for LSU, and LSU is for me. And make no mistake about that.

We have a lot of work to do, but I promise you, we're going to get this program



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LSU coach **Will Wade** walks into the Pete Maravich Assembly Center with his wife, Lauren, and daughter, Caroline.  
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



back to the NCAA Tournament and back to the top of the SEC in short order. And I'm honored to be your coach and represent this state and this great school. It's the honor of a lifetime to be back. You never get second chances in life, but we get one here. And we're going to make this better than the first time. With that, I appreciate everybody. It's great to be home. For the first time of many times – **BOOT UP!**

**QUESTION:** Did you ever think this was possible? And what did you learn from the first go-around that you want to employ this time around?

**WADE:** I mean, I guess you never count anything out in life. But when we left here, we never thought we'd be back. No, I wouldn't say I thought it was possible. Look, Kent Lowe (LSU basketball

sports information director since 1988) would know. This is probably the first time in college basketball this has ever happened. But hey, we like to do a lot of firsts down here, so it's appropriate.

I have a familiarity with the SEC. The first year it took some getting used to. The SEC has gotten even better. We've done some studies the last couple days to make sure we're prepared and understand what we need to compete. But part of it when you're at a school like LSU, you're in Louisiana. A lot of it's getting to know the people, the overall structure, and that's where we're just way ahead. It took us probably 18 months to learn everything the first time. Now, we're hitting the ground running. Here are the keys to the Ferrari, drive it fast. We're going straight down the road. We won't have the learning curve we had that first time.

**QUESTION:** Where do you feel LSU's commitment is to this program, your roster?

**WADE:** I wouldn't be standing here if we weren't committed. Like I said, we came back to win. We've got tremendous administration, tremendous people. We're going to win, and we've got the resources we need to compete in the SEC. At the end of the day, that's all we can ask. Then it's on me to get the job done. It's on me to make it happen. I'm very comfortable after our conversations with everybody that we've got the resources, and I'm excited to make it happen.

**QUESTION:** What will it take to win championships roster-budget-wise?

**WADE:** We've had some conversations. I'm not going to share that. But this is LSU – Verge Ausberry (LSU athletic director), Heath, Dr. Rouse, everybody

said, “Coach, go build a roster that will help us compete.” We’ve never put a number on it. We’re going to put a roster together that’s going to help us win and help us compete. And whatever that number is, the first year, it’s going to be a little bit higher. We’re going to have to get a bunch of new players, and the good players cost. They ain’t cheap.

The first year it will be high. But once you get them in and you retain them, and retaining guys is a lot easier than going to get them. So, the first year, yeah, there may be some sticker shock. But we’ve got a good plan. There hasn’t been a number put to it. It’s not like, “This is what you’re going to spend.” It’s, “Spend until you feel like you have a good enough team to compete in the SEC.” That’s what we’re going to do - put together a roster that everybody who’s watching and every person across this state will be very excited about and that can compete in the top part of the SEC.

**QUESTION:** Have you thought over the years in the back of your mind, “I’d love to go back there and finish what I started, get it right?” Do you think about that?

**WADE:** Yeah. I mean, you don’t like to leave something. I thought we were just getting rolling. You always wonder what might have been, what could have been, and could we have kicked it back up and kept it going. But I look at it like this - we’ve got a fresh start now. We’ve got everything in place to win that maybe wouldn’t have been in place had I stayed. I was fortunate. Two of the best years of my life were at McNeese, to make the impact on the community. And we’ve got a lot of folks from southwest Louisiana. We’ve got our entire delegation from southwest Louisiana here - our state senators and reps, everybody. McNeese helped me grow, get better. I’m excited to be back and finish what we started.

I do feel like there’s some unfinished business. I feel like we were just on the cusp of really breaking through, and now we’re going to start at a quicker point. It’s not going to take us five years to get to that point. We’re going to start at a much earlier point, and it’ll be a fun ride. Always is. We don’t lack for action.

**QUESTION:** When did the process of leaving NC State and coming to LSU start? And are there any regrets how that happened?

**WADE:** You know, we have a familiarity with everybody. I worked with Verge before. I worked with Dr. Rousse before. I’ve worked with Heath before. There wasn’t some formal interview process. We all know each other. We’ve all known each other for a long time. Really, what’s today, Monday? It really pretty much kicked into gear on Wednesday of last week. That was pretty much when the first contact was made and when the process started. But because of everybody’s familiarity with each other, it moved pretty quick.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** The pursuit of Wade started well before the previous Wednesday on both sides via back channels. Governor Jeff Landry confirmed what Tiger Rag reported previously that Landry and Board chairman Lee Mallett tried to hire Wade from McNeese a year ago before then-athletic director Scott Woodward blocked it. After that and Woodward’s firing last October, the two parties were never out of contact about Wade’s possible return. **TR**



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Brandon Murray  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# Will Wade Will Do “Amazing Things” At LSU

Former LSU And McNeese State Player Under  
“The General” Says He Will Turn Around Tigers

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

**Will Wade has shown he is a winner everywhere he's been in his career – Tennessee-Chattanooga, Virginia Commonwealth, LSU, McNeese State and North Carolina State, albeit brief at that last one.**

**Brandon Murray, who played for Wade at LSU (2021-22) and at McNeese (2024-25), expects even bigger things from his former coach in his second stint in Baton Rouge.**

“I think he’s going to do amazing things,” Murray told Tiger Rag in a recent interview. “I expect nothing less from coach Wade. You know how good of a coach he is, how good of a leader he is, so LSU is going to be even better.”

Even in the Name, Image & Likeness, NCAA Transfer Portal era, it’s critical for coaches to connect with their players. Two-time national champion Connecticut coach Dan Hurley, current national champion Michigan coach Dusty May, who previously took Florida Atlantic to the Final Four, and 2026 Final Four Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd all share the ability to balancing strategy recruiting and motivation.

You can add Will Wade to that list. His teams play an aggressive style of basketball and are well-versed in X’s and O’s. But what sets him apart is his ability to connect with players.

Murray said Wade handles his responsibilities on the court, but it’s his ability to motivate that makes him stand out.

“He’s the type of person that, because of the connection you have with him, you just want to run through a wall for coach Wade,” he said. “It’s not a lot of people that can balance both. He definitely has a lot of one-line hitters and everything. He’s a funny person, but beyond the basketball court, he’s a role model. He’s a father figure. He’s just a person that you would do anything for.”

Murray said Wade goes beyond coaching basketball, emphasizing life lessons and preparing his players for success long after their playing careers come to an end.

“It’s not always just about basketball,” he said. “It’s about him teaching you

regular life lessons, teaching you what to do without basketball, because like I said I know the basketball is going to stop bouncing one day. And just with him, he has a connection with you and your family and everything. Being under a coach like that, you start having standards for yourself and standards for the program. It’s just great.”

And Murray remains surprised that Wade at LSU again.

“It’s just crazy to me. It’s crazy for him to be back at LSU,” he said. “It’s crazy for the relationship with LSU and the fans, and I just know everybody is so happy.”

In today’s college athletics landscape, players often come and go over a season or two, making it difficult to build strong relationships. That hasn’t been an issue for Wade. Even after players leave his program, he continues to prioritize those connections.

“I can call him whenever I need something, call him just to talk,” Murray said. “He’s taught me different things with being under him for multiple years. There’s nobody else in the country like coach Wade. We still talk. He sends me something almost every Sunday, which he does to a lot of his players. So, I mean, it just goes far beyond basketball.”

Murray is the only player to have played for Wade at both LSU and McNeese. He said Wade’s coaching philosophy hasn’t changed much, but his ability to connect with players seems even stronger.

“I would say just the approach of knowing his players is greater,” he said. “He is able to connect with everyone a little bit differently. Every player has a different mindset, and every player is a different person. So, he is able to connect with them in the ways he knows how.”

To Murray, Wade just fits Louisiana and LSU, and they fit him.

“It’s great to see him back in his element, be back home,” he said. “It’s just great for him to be back home and be with the great fans and just be where he’s used to being. It’s great for the school. It’s great for athletics. Will Wade is the guy.” **TR**



Will Wade  
Photo by :Michael Bacigalupi

# “You Never Get Second Chances In Life”

But He Just Did, And He Has Gone Home Again, Too, Thomas Wolfe

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Will Wade has stuck it to North Carolina State, his former short-term employer in Raleigh, and renown author Thomas Wolfe, who hailed from Asheville, North Carolina, 240 miles west. Wolfe wrote the great American novel, "You Can't Go Home Again" that published in 1940 two years after he died at age 37.

Wade, who was fired as LSU's basketball coach in 2022 at age 39, is writing his and has gone home again, in his mind at least, to LSU, which hired him back on March 26 after firing him in 2022. Wade, now 43, is from and grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and graduated from Clemson in South Carolina.

But home is often a state of mind anyway.

And Wade is back home as if he is Marty McFly hopping in that DeLorean in "Back To The Future" in 1985. Or even before that – since the Yankees kept firing and rehiring Billy Martin as manager in the 1970s and '80s.

The only thing missing is a Miller Lite beer commercial with Wade, former LSU athletic director Scott Woodward, who fired Wade, and Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry, who fired Woodward last October partly because Woodward wouldn't fire Matt McMahon and hire Wade a year ago.

Yes, Wade has replaced the same man – McMahon – who replaced him after Woodward's right hand man and replacement – new athletic director Verge Ausberry – hired Wade.

And now Wade wants to correct the past, much like McFly, and probably get even, too.

"You never get second chances in life, but get one here," Wade said triumphantly on March 30 at his introductory press conference-turned-pep rally at a raucous Pete Maravich Assembly Center, which

really hasn't been like that much at all since Wade left.

"It took us probably 18 months to learn everything the first time," Wade said. And now we're hitting the ground running. 'Here's the keys to the Ferrari. Drive it fast.' We're going straight down the road."

Apparently, where he's going, they still need roads.

"I couldn't be more thrilled to be back," he said. "This is the right time to come home. We're coming back to try to hang a banner, win a national championship."

And to pay a debt.

"There is a part of me that feels that way," Wade said when asked if he owes LSU for how things ended four years ago and how he left LSU with five of his Level 1 violations and 10 overall.

"I've never connected with a fan base and with people like I have with LSU and Louisiana," Wade said. "I feel like we left the book open a little bit. We left some chapters unfinished."

Regardless of the NCAA violations – and most LSU fans have selective memory and logic concerning them – Wade did build a consistent winner at LSU from 2019-22 not seen since John Brady's run from 2003-06, culminating in the school's last Final Four.

His second LSU team went 25-5 and won the school's first SEC title since 2009 at 15-2 and reached the NCAA Sweet 16, though he was suspended in the postseason. After a 21-10 and 12-6 SEC mark in the 2019-20 COVID season, LSU went 19-10 and 11-6 and reached the second round of the NCAA Tournament before a 22-11 and 9-9 finish in the NCAA Tournament in 2021-22.

"To have the opportunity to come back and finish that off and bring pride and joy to people I care about who mean a lot to me, yeah, I feel a heavy burden towards that," Wade said. "That's a big reason I came back."

Wade took NC State to the NCAA Tournament First Four in his only season in Raleigh in 2025-26 at 20-14, 10-8 (ACC).

"There's nothing like winning in front of your friends and when you feel like you're playing for a bigger power," he said. "You have a bigger purpose."

That is LSU to Wade.

"A lot of my best friends are sitting in this room," he said. "A lot of my best friends are down here in Louisiana. We have a greater purpose with this program than anywhere I've ever been. That's why I came back"

And LSU has welcomed him back with open flames of enthusiasm.

"I came back to give back and hopefully put some joy and fun back into LSU basketball, where we're not just a stopgap between football and baseball," he said. "And to make sure we build a program that's excellent like everything else."

Wade listed baseball coach Jay Johnson (2023 and '25 national champion), women's basketball coach Kim Mulkey (2023 national champion) and gymnastics coach Jay Clark (2024 national champion, 2026 runner-up) and new football coach Lane Kiffin, who is expected to win one soon.

"Just to build a program that's worthy of the investment and all the folks here," Wade said. "I'm excited to be back and excited to represent LSU and Louisiana again." TR



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Photo by: LSU Athletics



# LSU Men's Basketball Portal Paranoia

Rome Wasn't Built In A Day, And LSU's Roster May Take Months

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

**I**t was 14 days after the men's basketball NCAA Transfer Portal window opened on Tuesday, April 7, that new LSU coach Will Wade finally got a portal player on April 20.

At least, he was not from a directional school or some nondescript mid-major.

Wade's first portal player was from blue blood Kentucky and came in highly ranked as the No. 8 small forward in the country – Mouhamad Dioubate (6-foot-7, 220 pounds). He will be a senior for the Tigers in the 2026-27 season.

He was also lonely when he first got to Baton Rouge, because there was no one else on the roster as all available players from former coach Matt McMahon's team had entered the portal.

Freshman point guard Jalen Reece had just left a few days before the April 21 deadline to enter. Players in the portal can join new teams after that deadline, but players could no longer enter the portal.

Dioubate, the No. 60 portal prospect by 247sports.com, averaged 8.8 points and 5.5 rebounds last season, mostly as a backup for the Wildcats, who finished 22-14 and 10-8 in the SEC after reaching the NCAA Tournament second round. Dioubate started 10 games and played in 31.

He averaged 7.2 points and 5.9 rebounds a game in the 2024-25 season for Alabama in 37 games. A deep reserve for the Tide in 2023-24, he averaged 2.9 points and 2.4 boards.

A native of Queens, New York, Dioubate was the No. 104 player in the country and No. 22 power forward from Putnam Science Academy in Putnam, Connecticut, when he signed with Alabama in 2023.

Wade planned to sign as many as 14 more through the summer.

But LSU fans were growing nervous as the first two weeks went by with nary

*Continued next page*

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# BOZEMAN

**Will Wade** greets fans after his press conference in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center on March 30.  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



a new player, but they should know Wade can be plodding in the portal.

In his first and only season at North Carolina State last year, he got off to nearly as slow a start. In 2025, he did

not sign his first portal player until 12 days after that window opened on March 24.

Then his next one did not come until five days later, and the next one four

days after that, and the next one a whole nine days later. He didn't finish his class of eight until June 1, but it was ranked No. 14 by 247sports.com.

So, don't get impatient, Tiger fans. Wade tends to know what he's doing.

The problem is he sounded like he had about 15 highly ranked portal players waiting right outside the Pete Maravich Assembly Center doors back on March 30 during his spine-tingling introductory press conference.

"I want everybody to know, our time is now with LSU basketball," he said. "I didn't come here to reflect and talk about the past. I came here to win, and we're going to win immediately. LSU and Louisiana deserve a winner, and that's what we're going to deliver. And we're going to deliver that in short order. We're going to find 15 players willing to lay it on the line for us every night."

Then he started talking portal.

"This is not something that's going to take long," he said. "We're going to get in that portal, and we're going to put together a winner, and everybody in here deserves a winner."

Or at least a roster.

"This is LSU," Wade said. "I was told, 'Coach, go build a roster that will help us compete.' We've never put a number on it. We're going to put a roster together that's going to help us win - whatever that number is. Look, the first year it is going to be a little bit higher. We're going to have to get a bunch of new players, and the good players cost. They ain't cheap. The first year, it will be high."

Wade has the Lane Kiffin approach to his first roster, which came in at a cost tapping \$40 million.

"So, the first year, yeah, there may be some sticker shock," Wade said. "But we've got a good plan. It's not like, 'This is what you're going to spend.' It's, 'Spend until you feel like you have a good enough team to compete in the SEC.' At the end of the day, that's what we're going to do."

But Wade learned through the first two weeks that other programs have big money to spend, too. And he lost Kansas State's PJ Haggerty - the No. 5 portal player in the country and No. 2

point guard - to Texas A&M back on April 10.

And Haggerty was not the only Wade target to go elsewhere.

-No. 27 portal player and No. 6 center Najai Hines of Seton Hall committed to Connecticut on April 15.

-No. 31 portal player and No. 5 combination guard Jeremiah Wilkinson of Georgia committed to Arkansas on April 14.

-No. 35 portal player and No. 4 small Forward KJ Lewis of Georgetown committed to USC on April 14.

-No. 44 portal player and No. 5 shooting guard Matt Able of North Carolina State committed to North Carolina on April 21.

-No. 98 portal player and No. 15 shooting guard Deven Vanterpool of Florida Atlantic committed to Providence on April 14.

If these players indeed turned down LSU, it may have been about money, or maybe it wasn't. Maybe, they just didn't like Wade as much as LSU fans do. **TR**



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Photo by: LSU Athletics



# **NIL Isn't Revenue Share.** **That's Exactly Why LSU's New** **Money Era Needs Transparency**

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

*As the House class counsel in House v. NCAA squares off against the College Sports Commission over multimedia-rights NIL deals, LSU's push to cloak its revenue-share breakdown under House Bill 608 flies in the face of what the public has a right to know*

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*Editor's note: This analysis teases out the critical difference between school-paid revenue share and third-party NIL, showing how the latest House v. NCAA showdown only underscores why public universities must be held to the light.*

When Congress and the NCAA shook hands on the House v. NCAA settlement, the goal was clear: turn college sports into a model of clarity, define new compensation pathways, and finally reconcile the NCAA's century-old amateurism creed with an exploding marketplace. Instead, one of the first big fights in the post-House era is a familiar one: who decides where the money lives?

In late April, class counsel in House v. NCAA asked a federal court to rein in what it calls overreach by the College Sports Commission (CSC), the sport-by-sport enforcer born of the settlement. At issue: whether the CSC can review multimedia-rights NIL deals—those agreements that route athlete name-image-likeness compensation through companies such as Learfield or Playfly—under the same authority it uses to police boosters, collectives and school-aligned NIL funds.

On its face, it reads like a footnote in a 400-page agreement. But in practice, it's a watershed.

Because revenue share and NIL aren't interchangeable. Revenue share is institutional compensation—money schools set aside, under the House deal, to compensate ath-

letes from a capped pool. NIL is third-party compensation—a marketplace of deals struck with collectives, brands, sponsors or multimedia-rights partners. The only thing they share is a headline spot under “athlete pay.”

And that headline matters.

In the motion filed on April 20, class counsel argues that multimedia-rights partners are not “associated entities or individuals” under the CSC's rulebook, which would strip those deals from enforcement. As OutKick bluntly put it, a win for class counsel could let teams push roster costs well past the intended revenue-share cap by funneling extra dollars through NIL partners—turning today's claims of \$30 million or \$40 million into just a starting point.

This is not a condemnation of every multimedia-rights agreement, nor is it a swipe at every school. It just shows how crucial those frontier lines are. The entire post-House architecture hinges on a series of bright lines: school-paid comp versus third-party NIL, boosters versus brands, fair-market deals versus recruiting inducement. Blur those lines, and the system morphs overnight.

*Continued next page*



The CSC’s playbook, according to insiders, treats multimedia-rights firms as NIL facilitators for individual schools. That means Learfield or Playfly deals, if they benefit a roster, may face NIL Go review and price-check scrutiny. The House lawyers counter that these companies are industry-wide service providers, not campus-centric boosters angling for

recruits. They argue the settlement’s “associated entity” clause targets parties with vested single-school interests, not networked media vendors.

This is a debate over NIL oversight—not revenue share. But the fight has direct bearing on Louisiana’s own turf battle: LSU’s push under HB 608 to hide its sport-by-sport revenue-share allocations from public view.

LSU is asking lawmakers to slam a lid on information that, under every standard governance and Title IX principle, ought to be public. This isn’t about whether Tiger athletes can strike deals with local restaurants or roadside car dealers. It’s about a public university deciding, in secret, how much of its institutional compensation pot goes to football, baseball,

women's basketball or any of its 21 varsity squads.

That secrecy pitch leans on "competitive harm": if rivals peer into LSU's playbook, they'll poach recruits by outbidding targeted sports. It sounds earnest—after all, who wants to gift Alabama or Georgia a recruitment edge?—but it's also a convenient cover for keeping stakeholders in the dark.

This is a public-records fight. And in a system already creaking under legal challenges and novel enforcement fights, it's the last thing Louisiana needs.

At LSU, as at every public institution, athletic decisions ripple beyond the locker room. They affect student-athletes, donors, taxpayers and the state's reputation. When LSU trucks an extra \$2 million into football, or slices off funding from gymnastics, it's not trivia. It's accountability. It's governance. It's the baseline for evaluating Title IX compliance and resource equity.

If LSU says women's sports will see protections, the public should be able to verify those numbers. If it commits to shoring up Olympic sports, the ledger should match the pledge. And if football gets the lion's share, we should know how much—and why.

The national NIL enforcement skirmish should sharpen that focus, not muddle it. Yes, multimedia-rights NIL fights will be settled in the courts. Yes, some third-party deals will fall under CSC review, some won't. But none of that changes the fact that school-paid revenue share is a distinct category—an institutional choice by a public

entity that deserves public scrutiny.

The truly dangerous outcome is a one-way mirror: let the NCAA negotiate and litigate its enforcement boundaries behind closed doors, allow third-party NIL to swirl in a blur, and then let schools shield their own budget allocations behind secrecy. That's an invitation to complexity by design.

The better path is precision. NIL remains NIL. Revenue share remains revenue share. Third-party deals get the privacy and review guardrails they need. Public universities get held to the public-records laws they've always answered to. Complexity doesn't justify concealment—it demands accountability.

Louisiana lawmakers face two separate questions. First: where does the CSC's authority reach when multimedia-rights firms sign athlete-compensation deals? That answer belongs in federal court. Second: should LSU be allowed to hide exactly how it divvies up its mandated revenue-share pot among sports? That one belongs at the State Capitol—and the answer should be no.

We tell athletes they're entering a professionalized ecosystem: coaches earning CEO salaries, conferences striking billion-dollar media deals, athletic directors running nine-figure budgets. Yet at the very moment the stakes skyrocket, we're asked to peer through a fog. If a public institution can't show its books, how can anyone trust the process?

Transparency doesn't make LSU weaker; it makes LSU better. It forc-

es discipline, builds credibility and guards against narratives crafted in the shadows. It lets fans see that when LSU promises to invest in women's basketball or protect Olympic sports, those dollars actually land where they should.

That doesn't mean airing every contract clause or broadcasting each athlete's payday to the masses. It means publishing sport-by-sport revenue-share allocations: the broad strokes that show institutional priorities without hamstringing competitive strategy.

The national NIL dust-up is a warning flare. It shows that even the architects of the House settlement can't agree on enforcement. If the system is already this contested, at least keep revenue-share allocations in the public domain. Let the headlines read: "Revenue share: football \$XX million; baseball \$YY million; women's basketball \$ZZ million." Let transparency anchor the debate.

NIL is not revenue share. Revenue share is not NIL. And secrecy—whether it cloaks third-party deals or institutional budgets—is just secrecy.

LSU can compete at the highest level and still show its work. It can protect athlete privacy and honor public-records obligations. It can lead in revenue sharing and answer the simplest question: how is that money divided?

In the new era of college sports finance, don't let complexity be the excuse for darkness. Demand clarity. Demand accountability. Demand that public universities remain, at their core, public. **TR**

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LSU Gymnastics missed winning a national championship by .0875 to Oklahoma on April 19th in Fort Worth, Texas. Photo by: LSU Athletics



# LSU Gymnastics Comes Up Inches Short In Heartbreaker At National Championships

But The Tigers Keep Closing In On Oklahoma And No. 1

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

**The LSU gymnastics team was right there with the top program in the nation again with Oklahoma at the NCAA Championships in Fort Worth, Texas, last month, in a meet that always seemed destined to come down to the tiniest of margins.**

**The two teams were neck-and-neck at the midway point when LSU sophomore Kailin Chio became the first Tiger in history to record a perfect 10 in a national championship meet. The moment gave LSU a clear surge of momentum heading into the third rotation and injected belief into a team that already looked fearless on the sport's biggest stage.**

It felt like the next rotation would determine everything. LSU moved to uneven bars, an event that had given the Tigers significant trouble just two days earlier in the semifinals. But this time, there was no hesitation. And LSU delivered the best bars rotation in program history at the NCAA Championships, posting a 49.6125 with nothing lower than a 9.900.

By the time LSU rotated to the fourth and final event, it held a slim 148.6000-148.5250 lead over Oklahoma. The energy inside the arena had completely shifted. LSU's sideline was full of smiles and swagger as the Tiger fans roared with every routine.

It felt like the pendulum had completely swung in LSU's favor.

Until it didn't.

Junior Kylie Coen gave LSU exactly the start it needed on beam, posting a 9.9125 in the leadoff spot. It was steady, composed, and exactly what championship teams rely on to set the tone. For a brief moment, it felt like a sign that LSU was on its way to winning its second national championship in three years.

But gymnastics, as LSU fans quickly learned, can change in an instant.

Sophomore Lexi Zeiss was forced to wait an unusually long time before beginning her beam routine, a delay that may have disrupted the natural rhythm of the meet. It was reminiscent of a kicker being iced before a field goal, which is part of that game, but

something rarely seen in gymnastics. Meets are usually designed to flow continuously from one routine to the next. The pause proved to be more than just an inconvenience. It possibly became a turning point.

When Zeiss finally stepped onto the beam, she fell. And in a matter of seconds, the momentum LSU had spent three rotations building up had vanished. She scored a 9.2375, and suddenly the Tigers found themselves in a position where perfection was no longer optional. It was required.

Junior Amari Drayton followed with a 9.8750, a solid routine that helped steady things but didn't fully recover the lost ground. Sophomore Kaliya Lincoln delivered a strong performance but was unable to stick her landing, posting a 9.8375.

With the championship slipping away, junior Konnor McClain once again rose to the occasion. As she had done time and time again, McClain delivered under pressure, posting a 9.9500 to keep LSU within striking distance heading into the final routine.

That left it up to Chio.

After already delivering a historic performance earlier in the meet with a 10, she stepped onto the beam needing a 9.9875 to tie. Chio delivered a strong routine but scored a 9.9000, just short of what LSU had to have. The Tigers closed the meet without enough to complete the comeback, finishing as national runners-up in a meet that could have gone either way.

In the immediate aftermath, LSU coach Jay Clark made it clear where his focus was. His first priority was protecting Zeiss, making sure the blame did not fall on a single routine or a single gymnast.

"This isn't about Lexi Zeiss," Clark said. "We can find a tenth all over the place. It takes five out of six on every event. It doesn't take six out of six. She's wearing it and shouldn't, but that's the kind of competitor she is. We wouldn't have even been in the spot to think about winning, if she hadn't done what she did on the first two events. So, she doesn't need to wear that."

*Continued next page*



Chio echoed her coach's message, reiterating the team-first mentality that defined LSU all season. She acknowledged that the outcome was not decided by one moment and emphasized the importance of supporting Zeiss in a tough moment.

"I just told her, 'We have your back,'" Chio said. "It takes five out of six. It may not be the perfect five out of six, or what we need it to be. But we didn't count a fall at the end of the day, and that's most important. So, I just try to help her and tell her we have your back."

Clark was right. The fact that LSU put itself in a position to win is remarkable in its own right. The Tigers battled injuries late in the year that forced key contributors like McClain and Lincoln to push through pain at the nationals.

Despite that, LSU performed at a championship level when it mattered most.

Meanwhile, much of the national media counted LSU out before the meet even began, making the performance even more impressive. The Tigers didn't just compete – they pushed the sport's top program to the brink.

"I've been a part of a lot over the years, and I don't know if I've ever been prouder of a team," Clark said. "They're gutsy, and they fought and fought and fought through injury and all sorts of adversity, some of which was known and some which was not. There's nothing for these kids to hang their heads about. They just did everything a coach could ask for them to do."

For Chio, the 2026 team will always be defined by its resilience.

"Just fighters," she said. "We haven't had an easy way for any meet. Each meet, we've had to fight. We fought until the very end, and we just left it all out there and just told everyone we're not done yet."

Under Clark, LSU has not only built an elite program, it has sustained one. In six seasons, the Tigers have established themselves as a consistent national contender, capable of going toe-to-toe with the very best.

While the Tigers were short this time, they proved they are closing the gap on Oklahoma, a program that has set the standard in the sport.

LSU's trajectory suggests that its breakthrough is coming soon.

"That's an 800-pound gorilla dynasty that we're trying to climb over, and we're just going to keep knocking on the door," Clark said.

## WHAT'S NEXT

LSU will enter 2027 as one of the favorites to win the national championship along with Oklahoma. The outlook is especially promising because of what LSU returns.

The Tigers will lose just three routines from their championship lineup - Courtney Blackson and Ashley Cowan on bars, and Emily Innes on floor. That means 85 percent of LSU's national championship routines are expected to return next season.

The core group remains intact, featuring juniors Madison Ulrich, Coen, McClain, and Drayton along with sophomores Chio, Zeiss, Lincoln, and Victoria Roberts. That combination of experience and talent will give LSU one of the deeper rosters in the country.

In addition to the returning lineup, LSU's depth is expected to grow even stronger as freshmen Nina Ballou and Haley Mustari are projected to take on expanded roles as sophomores next season.

The Tigers also add three incoming freshmen in Annalisa and Malea Milton and Audree

Valdenarro. Annalisa will enter the program as a four-star recruit, highlighted by strong performances throughout her career, including a fourth place finish on vault and in the all-around while tying for a regional bars title in 2021. More recently, she placed fifth on vault at the 2024 Core Hydration Classic and eighth at the 2024 Xfinity U.S. Gymnastics Championships.

Malea, rated as a three-star recruit, has also shown promise, most recently

finishing tied for sixth in the all-around and tied for second on floor at the 2024 American Classic.

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*“Each meet, we’ve had to fight. We fought until the very end, and we just left it all out there and just told everyone we’re not done yet.”*

*- Kailin Chio*

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Valdenarro is another three-star recruit and brings versatility after a standout performance at the 2024 California state championships, where she tied for fourth on floor, second on vault and in the all-around. She also won the bars title outright despite later suffering a foot injury that kept her out of nationals.

The future looks bright.

“We have have 21, 22 or 24 routines returning,” Clark said. “I hope it just cements their resolve and that they don’t wear this season in a way that’s defeating, but instead causes them to be more determined and not desperate. Because that’s not how this works. We’re not going away. We’re not going anywhere. We’ve got a great group coming back, and we fully expect to be back in the mix and take another swing at this next year.”

Chio believes the experience will only make the Tigers more dangerous.

“It’s great,” she said. “We always talk about the depth. A lot of our depth isn’t going anywhere, so that’s great to know. And the people who are incoming, I’m just excited for them to come in and join this team and continue building what we left from this year in hopes of getting it done next year.”

**SENIOR DEPARTURES (7)** - Courtney Blackson, Chase Brock, Ashley Cowan, Emily Innes, Alexis Jeffrey, Tori Tatum and Kathryn Weilbacher.

**EXPECTED RETURNEES (13)** JUNIORS - Kylie Coen, Amari Drayton, Konnor McClain, Madison Ulrich, Leah Miller. SOPHOMORES - Kailin Chio, Kaliya Lincoln, Victoria Roberts, Lexi Zeiss. FRESHMEN - Nina Ballou, Haley Mustari, Elyse Wenner and Zoe Miller.

**FRESHMEN SIGNEES (3)** - Analisa Milton, Malea Milton, Audree Valdenarro. **TR**

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Sam Leavitt.  
Photo by: Sun Devil Athletics



# Sam Leavitt

## Missed Most Of Spring Football

Follow-up Lisfranc Surgery On Injured Foot Sidelined The No. 1-Ranked Transfer Quarterback From Arizona State

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

# LSU projected starting quarterback Sam Leavitt, whom LSU signed as the No. 1 player and No. 1 quarterback in the Transfer Portal from Arizona State last January, missed the last three weeks of spring practice after a follow-up medical procedure on his injured foot.

Leavitt had the screws removed on April 6 from his Lisfranc surgery in early November 2025 for an injury suffered last season at Arizona State. The Lisfranc surgery involves realigning broken bones and/or ligament tears in the middle part of the injured foot with stabilizing screws, plates or pins.

“None of these are surprises,” LSU coach Lane Kiffin said at a regularly scheduled spring football press conference on April 7 when asked about Leavitt’s absence from practice that morning.

“This is the timeline we expected,” he said.

Kiffin may not have been surprised, but most people around LSU were. When Leavitt signed with LSU in January after a competitive recruiting battle with Tennessee and Miami, most knew he had the surgery in November. And everyone knew that meant Leavitt would miss most or all of spring practice. It was also known that the spring practices he did participate in would not include any team work, which was the case.

But few outside the football program knew about the follow-up procedure. And Kiffin did say early this year that Leavitt could participate in team drills and do more late in spring practice. That changed with Leavitt not avail-

able at all over the final few weeks, whether it surprised Kiffin or not.

“Sam had the screws removed yesterday, and everything went well,” Kiffin said. “It was something that going into it we were going to know that it was going to be unfortunate. He was going to miss spring – a lot of it.”

Asked if Leavitt had a chance to return to spring practice before it ended on April 24, Kiffin said, “I don’t think he will. He’s on crutches now. But maybe.”

He is expected back for August camp fully healthy, or close to it.

Leavitt first injured his foot on Sept. 20, 2025, against Baylor, but he kept playing before aggravating the injury on Oct. 25 against Houston. It was then announced on Oct. 31 that he was done for the season and would have surgery.

With Leavitt out, redshirt sophomore Landen Clark, the No. 65 quarterback in the 2026 portal from Elon when he signed with LSU last January, has been battling with No. 7 portal signee Husan Longstreet, a redshirt freshman from USC.

“The injury was going to allow the other guys opportunities,” Kiffin said.

Kiffin wasn’t overly concerned about his new quarterback coming into the LSU program injured.

“I just feel nowadays it’s a little easier to play quarterback than it used to be years ago as far as how long you’ve been there,” he said. “You look around the country. People transfer in and go play at new places. Look at the previous place we were at – the guy didn’t get there until the summer.”

Going into his sixth season at Ole Miss last year, Kiffin didn’t sign Trinidad Chambliss from Division II Ferris State in Big Rapids, Michigan, until last April when there were portal windows. And Chambliss missed spring practice.

But Chambliss still beat out returning projected starter Austin Simmons for the starting job. He then ended up finishing third in the nation with 3,813 passing yards on 294-of-445 passing for 22 touchdowns with only three interceptions and led the Rebels to a 13-2 season and the College Football Playoff semifinals.

“That went into the decision (to bring in Leavitt), whereas years ago, you would be really concerned that the quarterback was going to miss your spring,” Kiffin said. “Sam’s done a great job mentally in the meetings and walk-throughs and was able to throw some individuals before this procedure.”

Longstreet, meanwhile, appeared to take the lead for the No. 2 job over Clark behind Leavitt at a scrimmage in Tiger Stadium on April 11 as Leavitt looked on not dressed out. Longstreet completed 20 of 34 passes for 315 yards and two touchdowns with two interceptions.

Clark completed 14 of 27 for 160 yards with three interceptions. But he did connect with junior transfer tight end Malachi Thomas of Pittsburgh for a 70-yard catch-and-run touchdown.

Longstreet found Ole Miss sophomore transfer wide receiver Winston Watkins for a 90-yard touchdown pass that was between 50 and 60 yards in the air. And he hit junior transfer wide receiver Roman Mothershed of Troy for a 47-yard TD. He also found junior Hawaii transfer receiver Jackson Harris on an impressive, back-shoulder throw on the sideline for 12 yards. **TR**

Harlem Berry  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

A photograph of Harlem Berry, a running back for LSU, sitting on a bench. He is wearing a purple LSU jersey with the number 22, a white headband with the LSU logo, and large black and yellow headphones. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. The background shows stadium seating and large fans.

# Harlem Berry Was Always Going To Be At LSU

Running Back Only “Faked” Interest In Other Schools  
And Now Embracing Lane Kiffin’s Up Tempo Offense

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

# When LSU sophomore running back Harlem Berry was still at St. Martin's High in Metairie, he drew scholarship offers from Ohio State, Michigan, Alabama, Miami, Ole Miss, Florida, Florida State, USC, Texas, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas A&M, among others.

He was the No. 1 running back in the nation in the class of 2025, the No. 1 prospect in Louisiana and the No. 33 player overall in the nation by 247sports.com. So other schools kept trying to sign him, even though he committed to LSU on Jan. 3, 2024 – eight months before his senior high school season. And the only campus he visited officially was LSU that fall.

But the calls and the scholarship offers and the visit invitations kept on coming. Why?

“When I was getting recruited, I was trying to fake it like I was going to go somewhere else,” Berry said laughing during spring football media interviews. “But I always wanted to come here. I wasn’t going anywhere else. I’ve always been an LSU guy.”

And Berry never wanted to leave either after his first LSU coach, Brian Kelly, was fired during the 2025 season and replaced by Ole Miss head coach Lane Kiffin when Berry was a true freshman.

“I’m from Louisiana,” he said. “I’m from New Orleans. All I knew was LSU growing up. I committed to LSU.”

Ole Miss was one of those schools that

recruited Berry out of St. Martin’s. Kiffin offered him a scholarship on April 26, 2023. And while Kiffin and his new staff were taking over at LSU last December, Berry was one of the few offensive players from 2025 they were interested in keeping along with returning starting running back Caden Durham.

“Just knowing that they wanted me back here and me wanting to stay was real special,” said Berry, who gained 491 yards on 104 carries last season with eight catches for 32 yards. “It was a great feeling.”

Durham rushed for 505 yards on 111 rushes with 16 receptions for 91 yards as a sophomore last season. They will compete for the No. 1 job, but likely will split time in 2026.

“I always sit next to Caden in meetings,” Berry said. “He’s a good friend, and he’s helped me a lot.”

Another reason Berry wanted to stay after the new staff came in was how much Ole Miss’ running game dominated LSU in the Tigers’ 24-19 loss last Sept. 27 in Oxford. Rebels’ running back Kewan Lacy rushed for 87 yards on 23 carries with a 15-yard touchdown, while quarterback Trinidad

Chambliss gained 71 on 14 carries.

After LSU got within 24-19 with 5:04 to play on a 6-yard touchdown run by Berry, the Tigers never saw the ball again. Ole Miss ran out the clock with a 56-yard drive in 11 plays. Of the eight plays before Chambliss knelt three times, seven were runs, including a 17-yard gash by Lacy and an 11-yard bolt by Chambliss.

“That was definitely very exciting knowing Ole Miss likes to run the ball,” Berry said. “Especially when we played them. I learned from just watching that.”

Berry was also impressed by the pace of Ole Miss’ up tempo offense that put up 480 yards as Chambliss completed 23 of 39 passes for 314 yards and a touchdown.

“I was watching how fast they were moving our defense,” he said. And that was before and during plays.

So fast that LSU linebacker Whit Weeks lost his pre-game meal.

“There was a clip online of Whit throwing up,” Berry said. “So just seeing that showed how much they move and how tired they can get a defense and was something I was excited to see.”

Berry has noticed how tired Kiffin and his staff have been getting LSU’s offensive players preparing them for the up tempo attack to be unveiled this season.

“There’s a lot of go-go-go,” Berry said. “Yeah, this is definitely a different type of offensive scheme. A lot of different things I’m seeing.”

And a lot of prep work from new strength coach Nick Savage, formerly of Ole Miss’ whose last name fits him. Word has it players were calling home telling mom and dad how fatigued they were.

“Coach Savage, when we first got here in January, them workouts were devious,” Berry said. “I’m not going to lie. I was real tired. I called my mom, too, told her I was really tired. This was different. But we embrace it. We’re working and trying to get in the best shape we can for the offense. I’ve been trying to get my size up, at least maintaining it, and most importantly, my stamina to go with the up tempo.” **TR**

Jay Johnson..  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# What Happened To The LSU Baseball Team Formerly Known As No. 1?

The Transfer Portal Players Didn't Happen

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU baseball coach Jay Johnson mentioned needing to recruit better for the 2027 season while getting swept at Ole Miss on April 10-12.

Johnson took that a step deeper while getting swept at home by Texas A&M on April 17-19 for LSU's first back-to-back three-game sweeps since the 2021 season – a year before Johnson – and first sweep in Alex Box since 2022.

He vowed to never again have NCAA Transfer Portal busts like he has had this season.

The question was about his team's continuing failure at two-out hitting with runners in scoring position, but he gave a long, detailed answer that got into recruiting.

"Yeah, I think it's a deep-rooted thing," he said. "We're off, and it will never happen again. We need to be able to stay on the ball better. And hit the ball back through the middle of the field and the other way and hit the ball lower with shorter swings."

Johnson feels that he has too many players only thinking about home runs.

"It's not the era that these players that we are coaching right now have grown up in," he said. "A lot of them talk about exit velo (velocity) and distance and home runs. And those are great. We have plenty of home runs. But we need to attach professional at-bats, which is what we're known for and why we have two national championships."

Then Johnson got into his overall roster that features four highly ranked upper classmen from the transfer portal who have disappointed at the plate and athletically.

-Senior first baseman/designated hitter Zach Yorke of Grand Canyon (.250, 6 home runs, 19 RBIs, 5 errors, 32 starts) lost his job to freshman Mason Braun.

-Junior infielder Trent Caraway of Oregon State (.250, 2 home runs, 15 RBIs, 1 error, 24 starts) was replaced at third base in March by sophomore John Pearson. He is currently injured and questionable for this weekend.

-Senior infielder Brayden Simpson of High Point (.265, 1 home run, 8 RBIs, 15 starts) has also been out of the lineup for two months.

-Senior infielder Seth Dardar of Kansas State (.266, 5 home runs, 25 RBIs, 4 errors, 28 starts) has been good, but not great and has been injured.

"I made some mistakes in constructing the team in trying to replace two guys that were irreplaceable," Johnson said in reference to first baseman Jared Jones (.323, 22 home runs, 76 RBIs) and designated hitter Ethan Frey (.331, 13 home runs, 50 RBIs). They played their entire college careers at LSU and left after the 2025 national championship season.

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*“Ok, we won’t make that mistake again.”*

*- Jay Johnson on missing in the transfer portal*

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"We should've looked to replacing them through guys that were already in the program," Johnson said, referencing Ashton Larson (.256, 2 home runs, 12 RBIs, 5 starts last season). Larson transferred to Texas after his sophomore season in 2025.

"We need to replace them with players who were athletic and could play defense and be more complete players," Johnson said.

Johnson instead went for home run and RBI numbers in the portal after last season.

"OK, we won't make that mistake again," he said. "The power moving forward will come from players that start their careers here and develop it like Jake has this year."

Junior right fielder Jake Brown, who is in his third LSU season, leads the team with 16 home runs and 49 RBIs while hitting .318. He developed at LSU as Jones and Frey did.

But Johnson likely was just upset about his team's 7-2 loss on this day to Texas A&M. For he has gotten several excellent power hitters from the portal and should not totally abandon the portal for power. He knows that. It's about the mix.

There was North Carolina State third baseman Tommy White, who hit .374 with 24 home runs and 105 RBIs in leading LSU to the 2023 national championship and hit another 24 home runs with 70 RBIs and a .330 average in 2024.

There was Utah Valley second baseman Daniel Dickinson, who hit .315 with 12 home runs and 49 RBIs on last season's national championship team.

And there was Indiana State catcher Luis Hernandez, who could catch and hit .295 with 11 homers and 57 RBIs last year.

Johnson's current portal players have largely not done the job, but don't shut the portal door completely.

"We have a process of winning here that we have not been connected to as a team," he said. "And it bothers me. They know how I think and feel about attitude, competitiveness and those types of things. We've had way too many conversations about those things."

Johnson entered the last portion of the season with a simple approach.

"Even though it may not move the needle, I'm going to coach it like the flood's coming through town, if we don't win," he said. "And it's going to wreck everything and wreck everybody."

And his players better have a similar approach.

"Hopefully, everyone in the program will approach it the same way and give everything they have," he said.

If not, look for a very different roster in 2027. **TR**

Cade Arrambide..  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# The Tigers Are Not Having The Season They Expected

But They Will Always Have Cade Arrambide's  
Historic 4-Home Run Game On Rocky Top

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

In the end, LSU's 16-6 victory at Tennessee in 12 innings on April 5 may not be turned around a lost season.

But nevertheless, what an Easter Sunday it was on Rocky Top.

LSU trailed 5-0 through four innings and by 5-1 after six. And then somehow the Tigers transformed themselves into the most swashbuckling team in LSU baseball history – the 1997 national champions, who hit an NCAA record 188 home runs that still stands.

From the fifth inning through the 12th on April 5, LSU hit seven home runs.

And it was sophomore catcher Cade Arrambide of Houston hitting four of those in the role of Brandon Larson, who never hit four in a game in 1997. But he hit three in a game twice in that 57-13 season and still holds LSU's record of 40 that season, which is fourth in NCAA history.

Eleven LSU players going back to Jack Walker against Ole Miss in 1936 have hit three home runs in a game, including Larson and Eddy Furniss, who did it three times (1995, '96 and '98) at the height of Gorilla Ball and holds the school career record with 80 over that span.

Jake Brown also hit three in a game this season against Sacramento State.

But only one Tiger has four in a game. Arrambide hit solo home runs in the fifth, seventh and 11th and a grand slam in the 12th for an 11-6 lead to finish 5-for-6 with seven RBIs and four runs scored.

"I felt like I was in the zone," Arrambide said as if on cue.

Ya think?

"And I knew this morning, I was feeling good, my batting practice, everything," he said.

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*"I felt like I was in a zone."*

*- LSU's  
Cade Arrambide*

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Arrambide did not play the previous weekend because of a sore shin from the bumps and bruises of catching.

"I was just in there focused on my plan," he said as if he'd memorized the hitter version lines of pitcher Nuke Laloosh from the "Bull Durham" screenplay. "Compete, compete, run good at-bats, and get a pitch I can drive."

And for some reason, Tennessee kept pitching to Arrambide. Yes, he was the eighth batter, came in hitting just .262 and was 2-for-15 (.133) with eight strikeouts over his previous seven games. But really?

"What a special performance by Cade," LSU coach Jay Johnson said. Arrambide had 10 home runs and 27 RBIs as the Tigers went into their final stretch of the SEC schedule and was second on the team in batting average at .311.

"That win is definitely up there in my coaching career," Johnson said.

The Tigers limped into this series with infielders Trent Caraway and Brayden Simpson unavailable with an illness and an injured hand. Then freshman catcher Omar Serna Jr., who has split time with Arrambide, was injured in a collision at the plate in the third inning.

No. 3 catcher Edward Yamin IV came on and went 2-for-5 with a double and an RBI single. He was one of five players with two or more hits.

Then LSU lost Johnson, who pushes buttons and substitutes probably better than any coach in college baseball.

While trailing 5-4 in the ninth with two outs and a runner on first, Johnson got tossed after vehemently charging home plate umpire Eric Goshay over a very low, delayed called third strike on Arrambide.

As far as in-person viewing in the dugout, Johnson missed the game-tying, two-out RBI single by Jake Brown to tie it 5-5 in the ninth. And if that doesn't happen, Arrambide doesn't get to hit two more home runs.

Then Johnson missed Arrambide's home run in the 11th and his grand slam in the 12th. He also missed LSU setting a record for most runs in an extra inning frame with 10 in the 12th.

Asked if pitching coach Nate Yeskie or Arrambide took over for him, Johnson didn't hesitate.

"Arrambide – head coach," he said. "Called the go-ahead homer sign in the eleventh and the grand slam sign in the twelfth." **TR**



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# LSU Softball Is On The Rise

## Tigers Got Hot At The Right Time

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

The LSU softball team endured one of its toughest starts of the Beth Torina era this season.

The Tigers struggled at times in non-conference play and carried that inconsistency into the start of the Southeastern Conference schedule. LSU dropped its first five conference games after it blew three straight leads against Tennessee and missed several opportunities against Texas A&M.

For a large stretch in March, the rest of the season looked bleak.

But Torina's squad responded to become an NCAA postseason player. Since the

0-5 SEC start, LSU beat South Carolina, Missouri, Arizona and Ole Miss to put itself into postseason contention.

The Tigers will likely be in prime position to host for the fourth consecutive year. But LSU must close the season with more wins if it wants a chance to host an NCAA Regional or Super Regional by way of a national seed.

LSU's Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) number has hovered around the top 10. With a hot finish and a deep run in the SEC Tournament, the Tigers be in contention for that valuable top eight seed.

### May Schedule

LSU will wrap up the regular season in Baton Rouge with a three-game series against the struggling Auburn Tigers from April 30 through May 2.

The Tigers will then travel to Lexington, Kentucky, for the SEC Tournament from May 5-9 at John Cropp Stadium.

Then LSU will await its NCAA postseason draw.

Regionals are set for May 15-17, followed by Super Regionals from May 21-24.

The season will end at the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City from May 28 through June 5. **TR**



# LSU Spring Sports Are Primed For Postseason

By ANDRE CHAMPAGNE, Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU's various spring sports are gearing up to close out their seasons strong in May.

## Beach Volleyball

The Tigers will look to compete in the NCAA Championships from May 1-3 in Gulf Shores, Alabama.

## Men's Golf

Ranked in the top 10 nationally for much of the season, LSU awaits its NCAA Regional seeding. Regionals are set for May 18-20 at sites to be determined.

If the Tigers advance, they'll compete in the NCAA Championships, May 29-June 3 at the Omni La Costa Resort & Spa Champions Course in Carlsbad, California.

## Women's Golf

It hasn't been LSU's strongest season with a 13th finish at the SEC Championships. They now await an NCAA Regional on May 11-13 at a site to be determined. The NCAA Championships will be May 22-27 at the Omni course in Carlsbad, California.

## Men's Tennis

The Tigers will host an NCAA Regional in Baton Rouge from May 1-3. If they advance, LSU will host a Super Regional from May 8-10.

The NCAA Team Championships are scheduled for May 14-17 in Athens, Georgia.

## Women's Tennis

A strong run in the SEC Tournament likely secured LSU a host spot for an NCAA Regional in Baton Rouge, May 1-4.

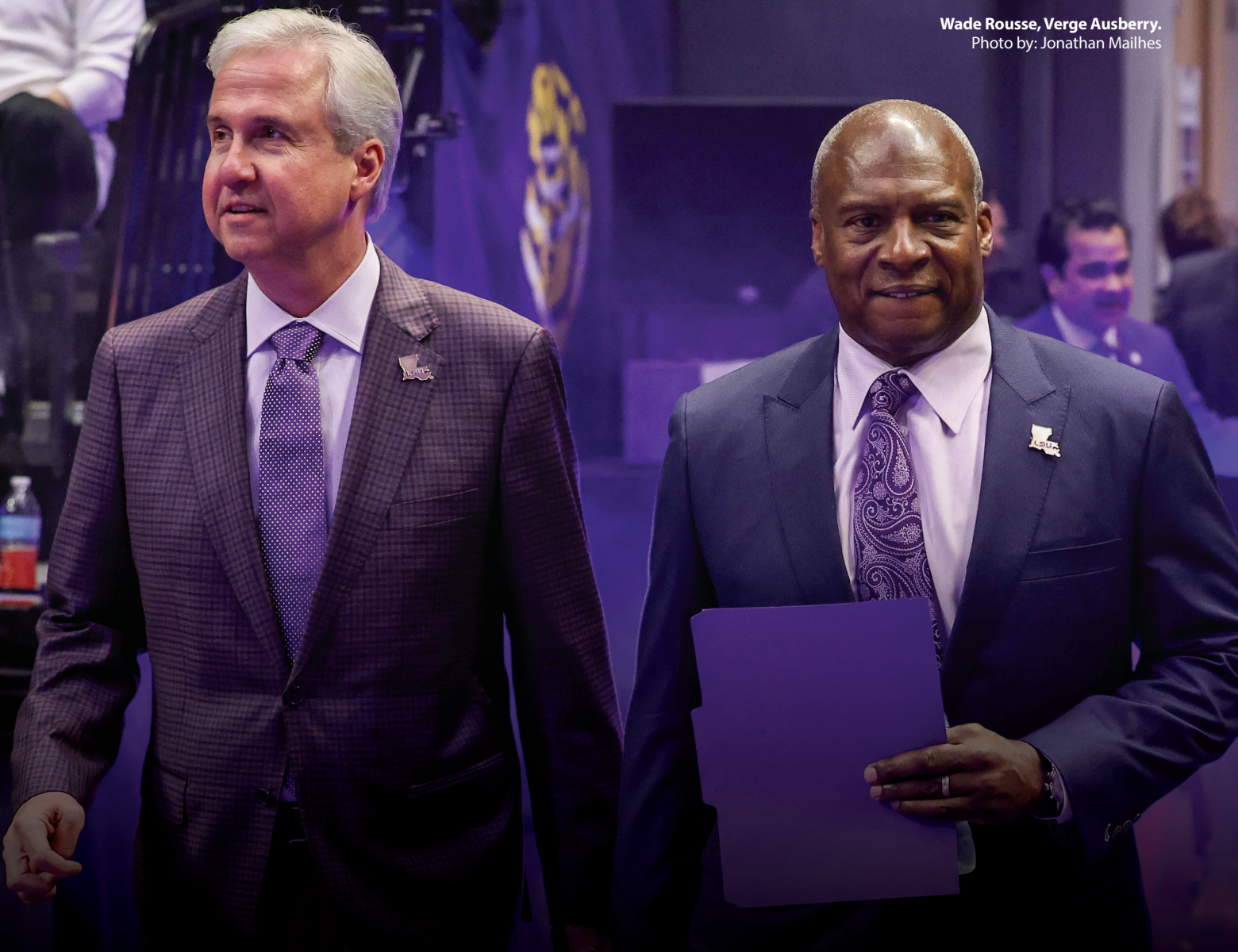
If the Tigers advance, they'll compete in Super Regionals from May 8-10 at a site to be determined. The NCAA Championships will be May 15-18 in Athens, Georgia.

## Track and Field

LSU will host the LSU Invitational on May 2 at 10 a.m. to close out the regular season.

The Tigers will compete in the SEC Championships from May 14-16 in Auburn, Alabama. LSU's next stop will be the NCAA East First Round, May 27-30 in Lexington, Kentucky, where it will look to qualify for the NCAA Championships in Eugene, Oregon, in June. **TR**

Wade Rousse, Verge Ausberry.  
Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



# LSU's Athletic Department Reshuffles For New World

But A Question Arises - Who's In Charge Here?

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

When new LSU basketball coach Will Wade was introduced at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center last month, there was something else going on beneath the surface.

New LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry – just promoted from executive deputy AD to AD last October after a coup d'état involving Governor Jeff Landry that removed athletic director Scott Woodward – was exerting his strength.

This was on the heels of new LSU president Wade Rouse basically hiring a new executive deputy AD the previous week.

Technically, Ausberry hired McNeese State athletic director Heath Schroyer as one of his deputies. But Schroyer worked under Rouse at McNeese and hired Wade in 2023 – a year after LSU fired him. That's too strong a connection to digest and think Ausberry just happened to want to hire Schroyer.

In the past at LSU, the athletic director usually hired or promoted someone to deputy more autonomously.

Rouse, who was just named LSU president last November 4, Schroyer and Wade – one job removed at NC State – are part of a manic McNeese Migration to LSU.

Before Wade stepped to the podium as the crowd of LSU's major donors, Board of Supervisors members, various other powers that be, dignitaries and media members hobnobbed about, Schroyer worked the room.

And remember when Rouse first became LSU's president on Nov. 4? He may have had it in his mind then to hire Schroyer as LSU's athletic director, judging by his erratic behavior at the time. Ausberry at first just had the interim athletic director title after replacing Woodward on Oct. 30.

"We'll assess the situation," Rouse told Piper Hutchinson of the Louisiana Illuminator on Nov. 5 when asked if Ausberry will become THE athletic director. "I can't make a very good decision after being on the job for eight hours."

When asked about Ausberry's contract, Rouse said, "We're supposed to announce that in days, if we're going to go down that road."

If you go down that road? You have someone else in mind?

Rouse was obviously not ready to name Ausberry THE athletic director. He did say he was going to take the interim tag off, but during a WWL Radio appearance later on Nov. 5, Rouse said Ausberry "is the acting athletic director."

Uh, "acting" athletic director and "interim" athletic director are the same thing, pal.

Rouse came to LSU highly recommended as a talented financier and fund raiser, which LSU needs badly as it projects to be more than \$30 million in debt in the midst of recent hires, fires and buyouts.

But someone apparently got to Rouse after that snafu as he soon said Ausberry is THE athletic director.

Yet, four months later, here's Rouse's and Wade's guy – Heath Schroyer – working the room.

"I can't even express in words what Dr. Rouse and the administration, everybody has meant to me," Wade said at the press conference. "I want to thank Governor Jeff Landry. I want to thank our wonderful LSU Board and our great chairman, Lee Mallett."

Landry and newly Landry-appointed Board chairman Lee Mallett – a friend of Schroyer and Wade from McNeese days – tried to hire Wade last year to LSU, but Woodward blocked it. Ausberry also didn't want that hire at that time.

Wade requested that Schroyer be in place before he would accept the LSU job this time. He likely did not make that request via Ausberry – probably higher.

On March 26, when LSU confirmed the hiring of Wade, it happened only after Schroyer's hire was confirmed.

"I want to thank Dr. Rouse," Wade went on. "We're going to work well together again, get that alignment. We've got Heath here – same chain of command, as Doc (Rouse) likes to say."

Same chain of command? Did Wade forget that Ausberry is the AD in the chain of command?

And Wade barely mentioned Ausberry in his press conference as Kiffin

did prominently and repeatedly at his introductory presser on Dec. 1.

Maybe because Ausberry hired Kiffin. Ausberry may have only assisted in the hiring of Wade. And he may have only officially hired Schroyer.

After the press conference, something else happened. Ausberry held his own impromptu presser as several reporters gathered around him.

"I will oversee the whole athletic department," he said.

Then he listed his lieutenants who will be in charge of new revenue streams for NIL packages and to pay Kiffin's \$91 million contract, Kelly's \$54 million buyout, Wade's \$30 million contract and his \$4 million buyout to North Carolina State and just-fired basketball coach Matt McMahon's \$8 million buyout.

Ausberry said Schroyer will be "the new lead administrator for the men's basketball team" after proving himself at McNeese as a talented fund raiser.

"That's the thing Heath does," Ausberry said. "He brings a lot of new money to us – a new donor pool to us. It gives us the southwest part of the state, where he's from. And he can work some angles down there that we haven't been able to get to in a long time."

Sure doesn't sound like the "chain of command" Wade spoke about.

"It's great alignment," Ausberry said. "It makes my world easier."

Ausberry also listed other administration assistants to fund raising in three other sports.

**FOOTBALL** – Executive deputy athletic director and chief operating officer Julie Cromer will continue to oversee football NIL fund raising along with chief revenue officer Clay Harris as the point person for football money. Also not new. Cromer is also over Schroyer, in case Wade hasn't had a chance to look at the staff directory yet.

**BASEBALL** – Senior associate athletic director for facilities and events Dan Gaston will remain overseeing baseball, but Ausberry said he has added NIL money raising for base-

*Continued next page*

ball to the duties of deputy AD/chief strategy officer/media relations Zach Greenwell.

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL** - Greenwell will also lead NIL work for the women's basketball program that will continue to be overseen by senior associate athletic director Miriam Segar.

"In addition to overseeing revenue share and NIL operations for the full department, I will be spending additional time assisting with women's basketball and baseball with their NIL fund raising, but also their NIL strategy," Greenwell told Tiger Rag. "The baseball and women's basketball piece is new for me in this newest reorganization, although I was already overseeing revenue share and NIL strategy for the full department."

Greenwell also explained that the athletic department has not been completely "restructured," as some reports had.

"There are some reorganized duties, but all of the sports administrators, except Heath Schroyer, were already the lead administrators for those

sports," he said. "Julie Cromer (football), Dan Gaston (baseball) and Miriam Segar (women's basketball) with those sports was already the case."

The \$20.5 million revenue share formula that goes directly to athletes also remains as previously reported – 75 percent of the \$20.5 million for football, 15 percent for men's basketball, five percent for women's basketball and the remaining sports divvying up the remaining five percent.

Ausberry did not list the other sports. And it is unique that LSU did not put out a formal release of this reshuffling. But LSU has been doing things of late by the seat of its pants, which have pockets spending much more money than they are stuffing at the moment.

There is a plan for major NIL and roster fund raising, in which Rouse, Schroyer and Ausberry – not necessarily in that order – will be key.

"We're going to be out there beating the streets," Ausberry said. "My job is to generate revenue for the whole de-


partment and make sure this department is in alignment – the president's office, the the board and everything else, so that we win in every sport."

Who wins in the sometimes volatile, Louisiana Governor's office, LSU Board of Supervisors' office, LSU President's office, LSU Chancellor's office and LSU athletic department hierarchy remains to be seen.

But it should be noted that when newbie LSU chancellor Sean O'Keefe clashed with veteran LSU athletic director Skip Bertman from 2005-08, Bertman won. And O'Keefe was fired.

Ausberry has been entrenched since the 1990s in LSU Athletics, LSU Politics and State Capitol Politics – which are all one in the same around LSU. And all these McNeese State East greenhorns to LSU – no matter how genius they were at McNeese – better know where they are.

My money's on Ausberry.

Either way, this will be fun to watch. 

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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.



**Andre Champagne**  
*Tiger Rag Staff Writer*

The LSU gymnastics team fell short of its ultimate goal of winning another national championship, but that shouldn't overshadow just how special the 2026 team truly was.

LSU finished second in the nation despite facing a number of obstacles throughout the season. Multiple Tigers battled nagging injuries throughout the year, and still, they put themselves in position to reach the pinnacle.

-Sophomore Kaliya Lincoln dealt with Achilles tendon soreness.

-Junior Konnor McClain pushed through an arm injury that she suffered just two weeks before nationals.

On top of that, LSU relied heavily on the same core group of gymnasts for most of the year, which is a workload that can take significant wear and tear on the body over the course of a season.

So, what does all that show? For starters, it highlights the culture that coach Jay Clark has built over his six years as head coach in Baton Rouge with the program's first national championship in 2024.

Reaching the top of the sport is difficult. Sustaining that level and returning to the national stage year after year is even harder, but Clark has LSU doing exactly that.

It certainly helps that the foundation was put in concrete over decades of work without much help from the school by legendary coach D-D Breaux. But Clark's ability to consistently get the most out of his teams, regardless of

## “We’re Not Going Away” ... LSU Gymnastics Coach Jay Clark On Continuing The Climb

circumstances, is what makes LSU an elite program.

There's no doubt that 2026 national champion Oklahoma remains the gold standard in collegiate gymnastics. No one will argue that, and they'd be foolish to do so. Eight national championships in program history and four of the last five titles speak for themselves. But the Sooners also understand LSU's capabilities and the pressure the Tigers are applying as they continue to close the gap.

And Clark is still building. It takes time to reach the level Oklahoma has sustained, but LSU is clearly trending in the right direction.

“That's a 800-pound gorilla dynasty that we're trying to climb over, and we're just going to keep knocking on the door,” Clark said after the national championship heartbreaker on April 18 in Fort Worth, Texas.

So watch out, Oklahoma, because LSU isn't close to where Clark believes it can be.

“We're not going away. We're not going anywhere,” Clark said. “We've got a great group coming back, and we fully expect to be back in the mix and take another swing at this next year.”

This LSU program is built to win in 2027 and in the near future.

In the short term, the Tigers return all but two routines for the 2027 season, bringing back 91.7 percent of their lineup. The only losses will be Courtney Blackson (vault/bars) and Ashley Cowan (bars).

The core will remain the same with sophomores Kailin Chio, Lexi Zeiss and Lincoln along with juniors Kylie Coen, Amari Drayton and McClain. Young talent is also emerging in freshman Nina Ballou, who made key contributions on floor this season. And freshman Haley Mustari is poised for a breakout 2027 campaign, with Clark is envisioning her in the all-around.

So yes, LSU is built to win now and over the next few years, but also for the long haul. And that comes down to one seven-letter word - culture.

During Clark's tenure, only one gymnast has transferred out of the program. That is extremely significant, especially in today's Name, Image & Likeness-driven era, in which athletes have more freedom than ever to move from program to program. LSU has created an environment that players don't want to leave.

Seniors have even chosen to stay an extra year or two just to remain part of something special, even without guaranteed competitive roles. And Clark ensures every gymnast contributes meaningfully to the team's success in some way, regardless of their time on the floor.

It's safe to say Tigers will remain a national championship contender and threat to Oklahoma. And sooner rather than later, they may give Oklahoma a serious run for its money.



**Todd Horne**  
Vice President / Executive Editor

**B**rian Kelly is on television now, and in a strange way, that may be the cleanest image of how his LSU story ended.

Not bitter. Not dramatic. Not surprising.

#### **Just displaced.**

Kelly was fired on Oct. 26, 2025, one day after LSU's embarrassing 49-25 loss to Texas A&M in Tiger Stadium. It was a midseason dismissal, not a quiet separation. LSU did not wait for the calendar to soften the blow. It acted when the moment made the decision unavoidable.

Kelly finished 34-14 at LSU, a good record almost anywhere else and an insufficient one in Baton Rouge. He now sits at 297 career victories, including those 34 at LSU. He came to Baton Rouge with 263 wins and one of college football's longest resumes. He built Notre Dame into a playoff program. He believed in culture.

#### **None of that was fake.**

#### **It was not enough anymore.**

Now Kelly has moved into TV commentary work, including appearances breaking down prospects. Major coaches often find that soft landing after high-profile exits. They sit under studio lights, talk ball and remind everyone they are still connected to the sport.

But with Kelly, there is another layer.

#### **There is the contract.**

LSU owed Kelly a buyout of roughly \$54 million, payable monthly through 2031. That money did not disappear because he stopped coaching. But Kelly's contract included mitigation and offset language, meaning income from

## **Brian Kelly's TV Job Is A Reminder That LSU Moved On From an Era**

*Kelly's buyout, offset language and move to television sharpen the contrast between the coach LSU fired and the coach it hired for the new college football economy.*

qualifying work can reduce what LSU owes him.

That makes the television work more than a postscript. It may be relevant to the buyout.

If CBS Sports Network or any other media outlet is paying Kelly for football commentary, that income should qualify as offset compensation under the mitigation language. Media work is not some unrelated hobby. It is paid football work tied directly to the expertise and status he built as a coach.

Whether the number is small compared with \$54 million is not the point. LSU should not be paying every dollar of the buyout while Kelly collects outside compensation without crediting it against LSU's obligation.

This is not a moral argument. It is a contract argument.

Kelly is entitled to what LSU agreed to pay him. LSU is entitled to the mitigation it negotiated. Both things can be true.

And that is where the LSU football story comes back into focus.

Kelly's television pivot lands almost too perfectly as a symbol. He is analyzing the game from a distance while LSU has moved into a different era with Lane Kiffin. Kelly represented structure, stability and traditional program building. Kiffin represents speed, volatility, acquisition and market response.

LSU did not merely change coaches.

#### **LSU changed operating systems.**

College football changed underneath Kelly. The transfer portal became roster free agency. NIL became payroll by another name. Revenue sharing arrived. Retention became as important as recruiting. A coach no longer has three or four years

to stack classes and develop toward a window. At LSU, the window is now.

#### **Always.**

That is why Kiffin fits the moment in a way Kelly never fully did.

Kiffin is faster and more adaptable. He understands that modern college football rewards aggression more than patience. LSU's roster investment and pursuit of elite transfer talent were not side notes to the coaching change. They were the point of it.

LSU hired Kiffin because the school understood the sport was no longer built to wait.

That does not guarantee Kiffin will win a national championship. Spending big money does not guarantee anything. A loaded roster can still fracture. But LSU's choice was clear. It wanted a coach built for the market as it exists, not the one college football pretends to be.

#### **Kelly on television sharpens the contrast.**

One coach is explaining the game. The other is trying to bend it.

One is being paid by LSU to go away, with outside income potentially reducing the bill. The other is being backed by LSU to attack the new economy.

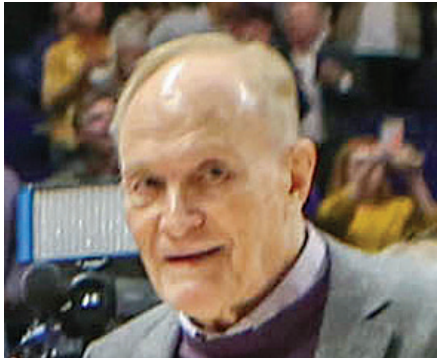
Brian Kelly did not fail because he forgot how to coach. He failed because LSU decided it could no longer afford a coach misaligned with the moment.

LSU did not just move on from a coach.

#### **It moved on from an era.**

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



**Dale Brown**  
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

## There Is Only One Kind Of Life That Truly Wins

I have always believed the impossible is what nobody can do, until somebody does it. Too often, we automatically believe the worst first, and the best last. Thomas Edison said, “If we did all of the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astonish ourselves.”

Growing up in a poverty stricken family, I used to dream about traveling, had never been out of North Dakota. Also, I wanted to climb mountains, North Dakota is as flat as a tabletop. Hope, to me, stood for “Have Only Positive Expectations.” Now, I have been in 90 countries and climbed the Matterhorn. Winston Churchill said, “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” Muhammed Ali believed that apparently, when he stated, “Impossible is not a fact. It is an opinion.” Steve Jobs felt the same, “The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.”

One of my favorite authors Emmet Fox warned us about the problems we presently face, “There is so much frustration in the world because we have relied on gods rather than God. We have worshipped the god of pleasure only to discover that thrills play out and sensations are short-lived. We have bowed before the god of money, only to learn that there are such things as love and friendship that money cannot buy. These transitory gods are not able to save or bring happiness to the human heart. Only God is able. It is faith in Him that we must rediscover,”

Coach John Wooden profoundly stated, “There is only one kind of life that truly wins, and that is one that places faith in the hands of the savior. Until that is done, we are on an aimless course that runs in circles and goes nowhere.”

The present divisiveness in our country must end because when commitments are weak and insincere or absent altogether, a civilization comes to an end. Public apathy has helped to cause the present dilemma we are

now facing. Many civilizations have risen to a dominant position in world history. Some rose quickly, some rose slowly, but without exception they fell after their unity was destroyed. Ronald Reagan described the situation we are in now, “No arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women. If we forget that we’re one nation under God, then we will be one nation gone under.”

Wake up, America, and understand - we must be the change we wish to see.

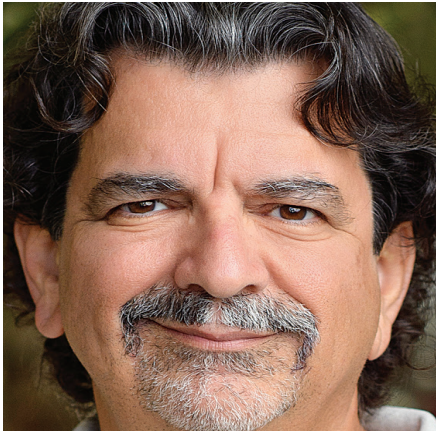
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**Jim Kleinpeter**  
*Tiger Rag Featured Columnist*

LSU baseball is second only to Tiger football in the ability to excite the fans. The season more often than not rolls on through the spring and into June.

This is one of the not seasons. At this writing the Tigers were staggering under two consecutive sweeps by Texas A&M and Ole Miss and are not likely to get healthy with Mississippi State, Georgia and Florida among the four remaining series.

It's looking like a season without a postseason.

But there is an alternative option. Tiger softball has had better seasons but has never failed to make the NCAA Tournament in the previous 14 years under Beth Torina, and the current Tiger team is just starting to get hot.

After a 1-5 SEC start, LSU went 8-4 to get even (9-9) for the first time with an overall mark of 32-14. A 13-4 record during the past four weeks has propelled the Tigers' RPI to No. 11 going into a key series at Mississippi State. The prospects are good for a strong finish with 3-15 Auburn at home for the final series.

A lot more significant ball is being played at Tiger Park than Alex Box Stadium.

The 2026 season started slowly for Torina's crew. The dominating wins against non-conference foes didn't happen as frequently. A trip to the Clearwater Classic resulted in a 1-4 finish and then the 1-5 SEC start.

## At Alex Box, The Lights Are Dim - At Tiger Park, They're Just Coming On

Coming out of last year's disaster in the home regional when the Tigers lost twice to No. 4 seed SLU, the season looked like a rocky road.

But the Tigers have gelled nicely. With three transfers jumping into the starting lineup and a fourth nailing down one of the top two pitching spots, a smaller tighter roster is clicking from top to bottom.

Shortstop Kylee Edwards, a transfer from Mississippi State, is Exhibit A. She was batting .143 after 13 games but is nearly 200 points higher at .328 and is now the 3-hole hitter after being dropped to No. 8 at one point. She has brought the pop missing from last year with nine homers and her fielding has been near perfect.

After the Ole Miss series, Edwards had 20 consecutive games without an error and only five overall for a .968 fielding percentage. In the circle, Cece Cellura had a couple of poor outings in the first month but at times recently has looked like the ace. She pounds the strike zone with 70 mph pitches while inducing numerous ground balls. She gives up a few hits and doesn't get a lot of strikeouts, but her games usually go by pretty quickly.

The best news for the Tigers is the emergence of first baseman Tori Edwards from what was starting to look like a season long slump. She went 6-for-8 with three home runs – all of them essential. She had six hits in eight at bats against Ole Miss – three of them homers – and drove in eight runs, raising her batting average from .248 to .281.

Edwards has carried a lot of weight this season after a startling 18 homers and 73 runs batted in with a .383 batting average which netted her SEC Freshman of the Year honors. She's been targeted

all season and not seeing much to hit evidenced by her 42 walks in 46 games, which puts her third in the conference in walks per game.

The Tigers have plenty of other strong performances, including leadoff hitter Jalia Lassiter, whose .343 average leads the team. Patyn Monitcelli came through with a huge relief performance winning all three games against Ole Miss, but the Tigers will need left handed ace Jayden Heavener to be more consistent.

Heavener had been on a roll of effective performances since a disastrous series at Tennessee. But she couldn't make it past the second inning in either of her two starts against Ole Miss, allowing six runs and nine walks in three innings total.

The confidence Torina placed in her team is starting to pay off. LSU has a little more power up and down the lineup and has looked better at getting its base runners home. Working opposing pitchers for walks is crucial in softball where the smaller field sometimes makes it harder to score on batted balls.

Tiger Park hasn't been as full as in past seasons, but that's good news for fans who want to catch LSU's best sport going.

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**Jim Engster**

*President, Tiger Rag Magazine*

Will Wade's motivation to return to the scene of his greatest accomplishment and worst defeat was a desire to come home. He was the toast of TigerTown in 2019 when he was exposed as a serial transgressor of NCAA rules. This is the place where his team captured the SEC title in 2019 and fans roared "Free Will Wade" over his suspension. LSU President King Alexander and AD Joe Alleva required police protection to leave their own arena. They didn't survive the year as a posse assembled at Juban's for the Monday night massacre.

Wade's new cohort, Lane Kiffin, arrived in Baton Rouge in search of home since he has never lived anywhere more than five years at one time.

The nomadic son of a coach has had addresses in Lincoln, Fayetteville, Raleigh, Green Bay, Buffalo, Minneapolis, New York City, Fresno, Fort Collins, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Oakland, Knoxville, Los Angeles again, Tuscaloosa, Boca Raton, Oxford and Baton Rouge in his 51 years.

Lane is a man on the move and can say with assurance, "I've been everywhere, man." The Johnny Cash song is an appropriate theme for the coach who has cultivated his share of critics with his peripatetic ways. A suggestion for theme music is that LSU will replace the Garth Brooks tune "Calling Baton Rouge" with the Eagles' classic "Life in the Fast Lane." Garth is too chunky to be associated with Kiffin, who is in the smooth Don Henley style. Brooks is no hot yoga aficionado.

It is a sign of the new age of high dollar coaches that Wade revels in the role of prodigal son at 43. And Kiffin is America's hottest coach despite two firings and two abrupt departures from football command posts he directed for other SEC original members. The brass at UT and Ole Miss thought their charismatic hire would lift them back to national prominence. They were jilted and will grimace as Kiffin leads the Tigers to Neyland Stadium and Vaught-Hemingway in a few months.

## Great Expectations for New Kids in Town

Kiffin is a striking presence in the mold of Paul Dietzel, who towered above superhuman star Billy Cannon. Dietzel made imprudent moves and spoiled his great potential. After leading LSU to a national title at 34 and leaving Louisiana with his second SEC title at 37, Dietzel migrated to West Point and to South Carolina. Struggles at Army and the other USC dropped his overall record to 109-95-5. Tall Paul is suspiciously missing from the College Football Hall of Fame.

After Kiffin was fired at LAX five games into the 2013 season by Southern Cal Athletic Director Pat Haden, four years passed before a head coaching opportunity brought Kiffin to Florida Atlantic. He was 26-13 in three years. Kiffin has now lived in America's two largest cities with initials B.R...Boca Raton and Baton Rouge.

Six years at Oxford resuscitated Kiffin. His record at Ole Miss was 55-19 (.743 percent). Overall, LK is an impressive 116-53, but his winning percentage of .686 is lower than the ledger of Les Miles at LSU. Miles was 114-34 (.750) and he was sent on his way after a 2-2 start in 2016.

Frank Williams Wade is eight years younger than his football counterpart and has moved from Clemson to Harvard to Virginia-Commonwealth, Chattanooga, back to VCU, LSU, McNeese, North Carolina State and LSU again in two decades.

Sixty years ago, LSU hired the head basketball coach at NC State in Press Maravich. He brought his son with him and Pete Maravich has reigned as the leading scorer in major college hoops for 56 years. Press was fired after six seasons and left LSU with a record of 76-86. His mark at Raleigh was 38-13 and he was succeeded there by Norm Sloan, who took the 1974 NCAA Championship, ending the eight-year reign of UCLA's John Wooden.

Kiffin also has a connection with NC State. His father was defensive coordinator under Lou Holtz at Arkansas when he landed the Wolfpack assignment. His predecessor was Bo Rein, who became head coach at LSU on Nov. 30, 1979, and died 42 days later in a mysterious plane crash. Lane was four when his dad was hired and seven when he departed the ACC in 1982 with a 16-17 overall record.

The stakes are huge for LSU with an enormous investment in two fellows with mercurial reputations. Kiffin and Wade provide box office bonanza and substantial risk at a university that has delivered more than \$80 million in buyouts to coaches and administrators receiving compensation for not working.

As LSU celebrates its 100th anniversary at the current campus, the physical plant is eroding while turnstiles sing at athletic events with an audacious half-billion-dollar arena planned despite a capacity three thousand fans below the PMAC threshold.

LSU cannot afford another Brian Kelly debacle. Kiffin and Wade are solid hires. Both recognize vast opportunity coupled with loads of minefields in TigerTown. LSU has collected three national titles and five SEC football championships in the 21st Century. Yet the last three full-time coaches have been fired with a combined record from Miles, Kelly and Ed Orgeron of 199-68 (.745 percent).

Only Nick Saban escaped the bayou with his dignity. He arrived at Alabama in 2007 after going 15-17 in two seasons with the Miami Dolphins. Saban was 206-29 (.877 percent) in 17 seasons with the Tide with six national titles and nine SEC crowns. With the tradition and investment of LSU and the pedigree and track record of Kiffin, the Saban standard is the output expected from Lane Kiffin by LSU's demanding fan base.

Wade arrives with outsized expectations, as well. Huey Long was alive when LSU men's basketball last won national honors. The program flourished from 1979-93 under Dale Brown with four SEC titles and a pair of Final Four appearances. John Brady was an able successor to Brown and led the Bengals to two SEC championships and the 2006 Final Four. Since then, LSU has not come close to the pinnacle of March Madness.

Wade was 105-51 in six years. His 2019 squad advanced to the NCAA Sweet Sixteen. He was sent on his way by President Bill Tate and AD Scott Woodward who are no longer employed by the Ole War Skule. When he left, Wade joined Brown as the only coaches in the modern era to guide LSU to overall winning records in the SEC.

Dietzel learned in 1982 when he was fired after returning as athletic director, it is a Herculean challenge to rekindle past magic. Wade may achieve that elusive quest while Kiffin is the best candidate in the country to be the next Saban. Still, success often elicits equal quantities of adulation, temptation and hubris.

The previously mentioned Don Henley noted in "Hotel California" that "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave." When it is time to go at LSU, a wise man once surmised there is one reality.

Nobody leaves happy.

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