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**KIFFIN VS. OLE MISS**  
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**THE SECRET MONEY**  
**OF COLLEGE SPORTS**

PAGE 30

**STEVEN MILAM'S**  
**LSU LEGACY**

PAGE 03

**2026 LSU FOOTBALL**  
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PAGE 24

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COVER 2, PAGE 3

# Tiger of the Month


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Steven Milam. Photo by: LSU Athletics

## Steven Milam

Steven Milam's LSU career has been a model of impact, consistency and defensive excellence. A switch-hitting shortstop from Las Cruces, N.M., Milam arrived as a freshman All-American in 2024, hitting .326 with eight home runs, 40 RBI and a .415 on-base percentage. He became LSU's everyday shortstop in 2025 and never left the lineup, starting all 68 games while batting .295 with 14 doubles, two triples, 11 homers, 57 RBI and a .979 fielding percentage. This spring, he has been even cleaner defensively: through May 16, Milam started all 55 games, hit .297 with 15 doubles, one triple, nine homers, 43 RBI, 50 runs, a .414 OBP and .505 slugging percentage, while committing only three errors in 202 chances for a .985 fielding percentage. Jay Johnson has called him the best shortstop in LSU history. The numbers make it a legitimate conversation. 

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# Table of Contents

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ON THE COVER:

LSU football Coach Lane Kiffin has a date at Ole Miss on September 19th.



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- 05** THE NO B.S. ZONE  
by Glenn Guilbeau
- 06** MAILBAG:  
VANITY FAIR REACTION
- 07** FOR THE FAN ON THE FLY  
Presented by the Baton Rouge Airport
- 08** TIGER TIDBITS: LSU-OLE MISS  
BIGGER THAN FOOTBALL
- 12** CALENDAR
- 14** NEXT LEVEL TIGERS:  
NAZ REID HONORED AGAIN
- 16** EYE ON THE SEC:  
GREG SANKEY SLIPPING?  
Presented by the Louisiana Lottery
- 18** FROM THE VAULT:  
WARREN MORRIS SPEAKS  
Presented by Campus Federal
- 20** THE SITDOWN: INSIDE THE  
LANE KIFFIN INTERVIEW  
Presented by HUB International
- 24** 2026 FOOTBALL  
TRAVEL GUIDE: LSU TO  
TAKE FIVE SEC TRIPS
- 30** THE FISCAL FIGHT AROUND  
THE LSU EDD
- 38** AHMAD HUDSON:  
A FUTURE 2-SPORT STAR  
IN THE MAKING?

- 40** LSU FOOTBALL'S SAVAGE  
APPROACH TO TRAINING
- 42** LSU BASEBALL'S  
FALL FROM GRACE
- 46** THE MAN IN FRONT  
OF WARREN MORRIS
- 48** BETH TORINA TURNS  
IT AROUND
- 50** WILL WADE MAKING NOISE
- 52** KIM MULKEY  
MAKES HER POINT
- 53** LSU GOLF THRIVES
- 54** LSU WOMEN'S TENNIS  
OVERACHIEVES
- 56** EXTRA POINTS:  
LSU ARENA IN JEOPARDY  
by Todd Horne
- 57** MOTIVATIONAL MOMENTS:  
DADDY DALE'S FIRST CONTRACT  
by Dale Brown
- 58** KLEINPETER DIARY:  
WILL WADE GOES INTERNATIONAL  
by Jim Kleinpeter
- 59** STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:  
PLAYOFFS OR BUST FOR  
LANE KIFFIN  
by Jim Engster



Photo by: LSU Athletics



**Glenn Guilbeau**  
Tiger Rag Editor

The years ending in 6 in LSU history tend to be cause for landmark reunions and much celebration.

-Warren Morris' walk-off home run into immortality has its 30-year reunion June 8, and Morris is the subject of our "From The Vault" department in this issue.

-LSU men's basketball went to its last Final Four 20 years ago last April. And the coach, John Brady, goes into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in Natchitoches on June 27 after making the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches (LABC) Hall this May and LSU's Hall last September for a triumvirate trifecta.

-One of LSU basketball coach Dale Brown's greatest teams recently celebrated the 40-year anniversary of its 1986 Final Four.

-LSU baseball coach Skip Bertman's first of 11 College World Series teams in 1986 turns 40 this June.

But as of yet, no reunions are scheduled for the trilogy of tragedy that has beset the three major LSU teams in the sports calendar of 2025-26.

Beneath the hugely significant back-to-back hires of rock stars Lane Kiffin for LSU Football last November and Will Wade – albeit more of the Gangsta Rap variety – for LSU Men's Basketball last March – is the fact that this has been the worst LSU sports year for football, men's basketball and baseball in Southeastern Conference play since 1965-66.

Left in the wake of this Dark Ages season were football coach Brian Kelly and men's basketball coach Matt McMahon - fired back-to-back. Baseball coach Jay Johnson had as bad a year as both – if not worse. But he will survive, obviously. And with a lot more time on his hands now to recruit for 2027 because LSU was not expected to reach the NCAA postseason barring a miracle at the SEC Tournament, he should be able to reload well.

Without further ado, here are the bloody details of 2025-26 first uncovered by TigerBait.com star Preston Guy's excellent research.

## LSU Will Likely Not Be Commemorating This 60-Year Anniversary

The Big Three – LSU Football, Men's Basketball and Baseball – finished the 2025-26 season in SEC regular season play at 15-41 for a putrid .268 winning percentage. That's 3-5 in football, 3-15 in men's basketball and 9-21 in baseball. The shocking LSU baseball season after the 2025 national title and No. 1 ranking entering this season got Guy thinking. The 21 regular season losses are the most in the history of LSU, which began playing baseball in the SEC in 1933. That broke the record of the 1978 Tigers, who were 12-34 overall and 6-18 in the SEC in the last season of coach Jim Smith.

The last time LSU had a Trio of Terror like this in the SEC was in 1965-66 at 9-29 for a .236 winning percentage. LSU Football under coach Charles McClendon was 3-3. Men's basketball coach Frank Truitt went 2-14 and was replaced by Press Maravich. And baseball went 4-12 in the first season of Smith.

Break out the champagne, and here's to a less Haunted History in 2026-27.

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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# Lane Kiffin Showed His Vanity With Unfair Comment About Ole Miss In Vanity Fair Article Gone Viral

By Glenn Guilbeau, Tiger Rag Editor

He just couldn't leave it alone.

LSU football coach Lane Kiffin showed why he needs to let go of Ole Miss as much as Ole Miss needs to let go of him in a Vanity Fair article last month.

In an otherwise positive and interesting feature about Kiffin, Kiffin made a mic drop comment to writer Chris Smith, who asked a simple question about why he left Ole Miss after last season.

And Kiffin goes on to say that top recruits would tell him, 'Coach, we really

like you. But my grandparents aren't letting me move to Oxford.' That doesn't come up when you say Baton Rouge. Parents were here this weekend saying the campus diversity feels so great. 'It feels like there's no segregation. And we want that for our kid.'"

To that, @ChrisGordy, a Houston sports radio talk show host, tweeted, "It's getting to a point where Greg Sankey (SEC commissioner) may have to move LSU-Ole Miss to a neutral site."

National FOX and CBS announcer @TimBrando tweeted, "As a Louisiana native and the father of LSU & Ole Miss kids, I'm ashamed of how Lane decided to use an easy stereotype with a New York writer."

And @Aaron\_Torres of FOX Sports Radio tweeted, "Lane Kiffin is one of the best play callers and offensive minds of my life. He is also a trainwreck off the field. Even for Lane, this is unhinged and gross."

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Jon Rothstein  
@NotJONRoth

Source: Tom Izzo is the coach who was NOT happy with the addition of RJ Luis to the LSU tigers roster. Izzo also remarked Wade is “one of the most useless basketball minds” in the sport.



Pat Forde  
@ByPatForde

Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, Will’s gotta scam



Wilson Alexander  
@whalexander

Lane Kiffin said this to @On3 regarding his comments to Vanity Fair about differences in recruiting at Ole Miss and LSU.

“I really apologize if anybody at Ole Miss or in Mississippi was offended by that,” Kiffin said. “In a four-hour interview, I was asked a lot of questions on a lot of things, and Ole Miss has been wonderful to me and to my family. I was asked questions about the differences in recruiting, and I said a narrative that we battled there from some out-of-state Black parents and grandparents was not wanting their kid to move to Mississippi. That’s a narrative that coaches have been fighting forever. It wasn’t calculated by bringing it up.”



Matt Hayes  
@MattHayesCFB

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Photo illustration by: Jake McMains



## Lane Kiffin's Vanity Fair Comments Turned LSU-Ole Miss Into Something Bigger Than Football

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Executive Editor

Lane Kiffin's return to Oxford on Sept. 19 was already going to be emotional. Then Vanity Fair happened.

Kiffin's nationally discussed profile in the May 2026 issue ignited backlash across the SEC after he described Baton Rouge as culturally different from Oxford and suggested some recruits' families

were uncomfortable with Ole Miss and Mississippi. The comments detonated on social media, sports radio and inside SEC circles almost immediately.

What would have been a dramatic football reunion became personal.

Ole Miss fans already viewed Kiffin's departure to LSU after the 2025 season

as betrayal. His six seasons in Oxford produced four double-digit win seasons and elevated the Rebels into consistent national relevance. In many ways, he became the most impactful Ole Miss coach since Johnny Vaught.

But the Vanity Fair article changed the emotional temperature.

National broadcasters and analysts openly criticized Kiffin's remarks. FOX Sports Radio's Aaron Torres called the comments "unhinged and gross," while Tim Brando said he was "ashamed" Kiffin leaned into stereotypes with a national publication.

Now comes the collision.

LSU travels to Vaught-Hemingway Stadium on Sept. 19 in what already feels like the SEC's most emotionally charged game of the 2026 season. Tiger Rag's 2026 Football Travel Guide called it "Louisiana-Mississippi Armageddon."

And unlike most rivalry games, this one won't need manufactured storylines.

Ole Miss believes Kiffin abandoned them. LSU believes Kiffin was built for Baton Rouge. And after Vanity Fair, Oxford is waiting for him.

#### **EVEN LSU ADMITS OLE MISS GOT IT RIGHT WITH KIFFIN**

Six months after Lane Kiffin left Ole Miss for LSU, even LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry now admits Ole Miss made the correct decision by refusing to let Kiffin coach the Rebels during their College Football Playoff run.

"If I'm Ole Miss, I probably would've made the same decision," Ausberry told USA Today. "I know LSU would've made the same decision. I don't blame anybody."

That quote matters because it cuts directly against months of national debate after Ole Miss athletic director Keith Carter removed Kiffin from the Rebels' postseason plans once Kiffin accepted the LSU job following the 2025 regular season.

At the time, many around college football — including media voices and LSU fans — argued Ole Miss should have allowed Kiffin to finish the playoff run in Oxford.

Ole Miss never seriously considered it.

And now LSU's own administration essentially acknowledges why.

The optics would have been impossible: Kiffin simultaneously coaching Ole Miss in the playoff while actively recruiting and operating as LSU's new head coach. Ole Miss officials feared becoming a "walking billboard" for a rival SEC

program while risking roster movement toward Baton Rouge.

The timing of Ausberry's comments is also notable because they arrive just weeks after Kiffin reignited tensions with Ole Miss in his controversial Vanity Fair profile, where comments about Oxford and Mississippi culture created backlash throughout the SEC.

Now the buildup toward LSU's Sept. 19 trip to Oxford has become even more combustible.

This stopped being a normal coaching departure months ago.



## **Shaquille O'Neal Returned To LSU For Something Bigger Than Basketball**

LSU basketball and NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal has done just about everything there is to do in sports.

National Player of the Year.

No. 1 overall NBA Draft pick.

Four-time NBA champion.

Hall of Famer.

Business mogul.

Television icon.

And on Saturday morning inside the Pete Maravich Assembly Center, he added another accomplishment to a résumé that already towers over college basketball history.

He earned another degree from LSU.

O'Neal walked across the graduation stage at the PMAC to receive his Master of Liberal Arts degree from LSU's College of Humanities & Social Sciences. For most people in attendance, the moment likely felt surreal. One of the most recognizable athletes on the planet was not there as a celebrity guest or honored speaker. He was there as a graduate.

Somewhere outside the building stands the bronze statue LSU unveiled in his honor in 2011. Inside hangs the retired No. 33 jersey commemorating one of the most dominant careers in school history.

But Saturday was not about what Shaq already accomplished.

It was about finishing something.

O'Neal arrived at LSU for the 1989-90 season and immediately transformed the program into a national power. In three seasons with the Tigers, he scored 1,941 points, grabbed 1,217 rebounds and became one of the most dominant players in SEC history. He remains LSU's No. 5 all-time scorer and No. 2 rebounder while winning Associated Press National Player of the Year honors in 1991.

The Orlando Magic selected him with the No. 1 overall pick in the 1992 NBA Draft, launching one of basketball's most successful careers. Yet through all the championships, endorsements, television success and global fame, LSU remained unfinished business academically.

O'Neal first graduated from LSU in December 2000. The next night, LSU retired his jersey.

Now, 26 years later, he returned again for another degree.

That may be the most impressive part of the story.

Shaq did not need another diploma for money, fame or validation. He did it because education still mattered to him long after basketball stopped needing to.

*(continued next page)*



TIGER TIDBITS



Jalen Reed  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

### Former LSU Forward Jalen Reed Graduates, Heads To Defending National Champion Michigan

Former LSU forward Jalen Reed graduated from LSU in May with a degree in Sport Administration with a concentration in Sports Leadership before officially beginning the next chapter of his basketball career at Michigan.

Reed, who spent four seasons at LSU, transferred this off-season to the defending national champions and will play for the Wolverines in 2026-27.

The Jackson, Mississippi, native battled injuries throughout his LSU career, including season-ending setbacks in both 2025 and 2026. Still, he appeared in 79 games with 39 starts and averaged 6.6 points and 4.1 rebounds during his career with the Tigers.

Meanwhile, former LSU guard Max Mackinnon also earned his degree this weekend after one season with the Tigers. The Brisbane, Australia, native graduated in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in General Studies from LSU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Mackinnon averaged 15.7 points and 4.3 rebounds last season while starting 30 games for LSU. He finished his four-year college career — which included stops at Elon, Portland and LSU — with 1,689 career points and 178 three-pointers. **TR**



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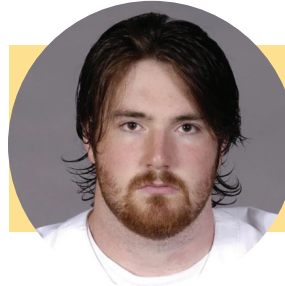
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FORMER LSU OFFENSIVE LINEMAN  
**ROBERT SMITH**



**6/16**

HAPPY 27TH BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU WIDE RECEIVER  
**JUSTIN JEFFERSON**



**6/20**

HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU CORNER  
**DEREK STINGLEY JR.**



**6/20**

HAPPY 41ST BIRTHDAY  
TO FORMER LSU QUARTERBACK  
**MATT FLYNN**



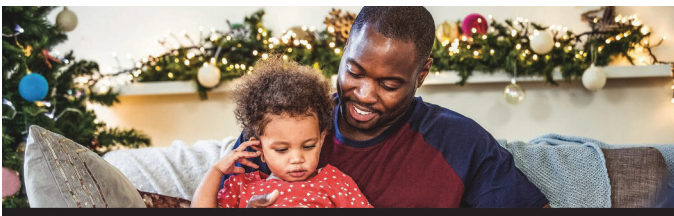
**6/25**

HAPPY 28TH BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU OUTFIELDER  
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**6/30**

HAPPY 46TH BIRTHDAY TO  
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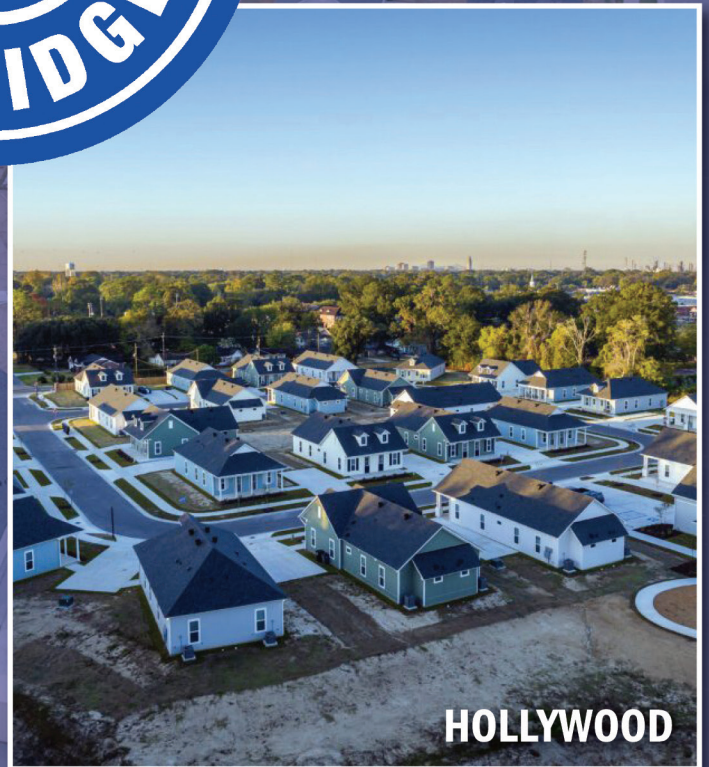
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Naz Reid.  
Photo by: NBA.com



## Former LSU Basketball Star Naz Reid Wins Bob Pettit Award For 3rd Time In 4 Years

Four Ex-Tigers Reached NBA Playoffs

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Naz Reid was named the top professional player from a college in Louisiana last month for the third time over the last four years at the Louisi-

ana Association of Basketball Coaches banquet at the Baton Rouge Marriott.

Reid, a power forward in his seventh season with the Minnesota Timber-

wolves, won the award for the second consecutive year. He was an undrafted free agent in 2019 by Minnesota and has since signed two contract extensions.

In his only season at LSU in 2018-19, the Asbury Park, New Jersey, native helped lead coach Will Wade's Tigers to the Southeastern Conference regular season title with a 28-17 and 16-2 record and Sweet 16 finish in the NCAA Tournament. Reid averaged 13.6 points and 7.2 rebounds for the Tigers.

Reid and the Timberwolves defeated the Denver Nuggets in six games to advance to the Western Conference semifinals against San Antonio in May. Reid scored 15 points with seven rebounds and four assists in the 110-98 clinching victory.

In the regular season, Reid averaged 13.6 points, 6.2 rebounds and 2.2 assists in 77 games. For his career, he has played 483 career games, averaging 11.9 points. In the opening round series win over Denver, Reid had four double-figure scoring games. In Minnesota's first 11 playoff games of '26, he averaged 12.1 points, 7.4 rebounds and 2.2 assists in 26.5 minutes a game.

Three other former LSU Tigers reached the NBA post-season – Trenderon Watford of Philadelphia, Tari Eason of Houston and Garrett Temple of Toronto.

Watford and the 76ers beat Orlando in a play-in before taking Boston in the Eastern Conference playoffs in seven games after trailing, 3-1. The 76ers had never previously come back from such a deficit, and they won a playoff series from Boston for the first time since 1982. They then were swept by the New York Knicks.

In his first season with the 76ers and fifth in the NBA, Watford averaged 6.5 points, 3.3 rebounds and 2.5 assists in 16.3 minutes a game in 53 games. At LSU, he played 59 career games in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons, averaging 13.6 points and 7.2 rebounds and 16.3 points and 7.4 rebounds, respectively.

Eason was one of LSU's first portal players, coming to the Tigers before the 2021-22 season from after his freshman campaign at Cincinnati. He earned SEC Sixth Man of the Year honors, averaging 16.9 points, 6.6 rebounds and 1.9 steals per game while shooting 52.1 percent from the field. Eason is in his fourth NBA season and has averaged 25.8 minutes a game in 60 career games with 10.5 points, 6.3 rebounds and 1.5 assists a game for Houston.

The Rockets lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in six games in the first round of the playoffs.

Temple is the longest-tenured veteran of the LSU players now in the NBA as he just finished his 16th year. He concluded the regular season with his 793rd career appearance on April 12, which moved him past Bob Pettit (792 games) into second place among LSU players in NBA appearances behind only Shaquille O'Neal's 1,207.

Temple played in 134 games for the Tigers, helping LSU to the NCAA Final Four in 2006 and winning his second SEC title with the team in 2009. He played in just 22 games this past season for Toronto, averaging 3.3 minutes a game.

Toronto lost to Cleveland in seven games in the first round of the playoffs. **TR**



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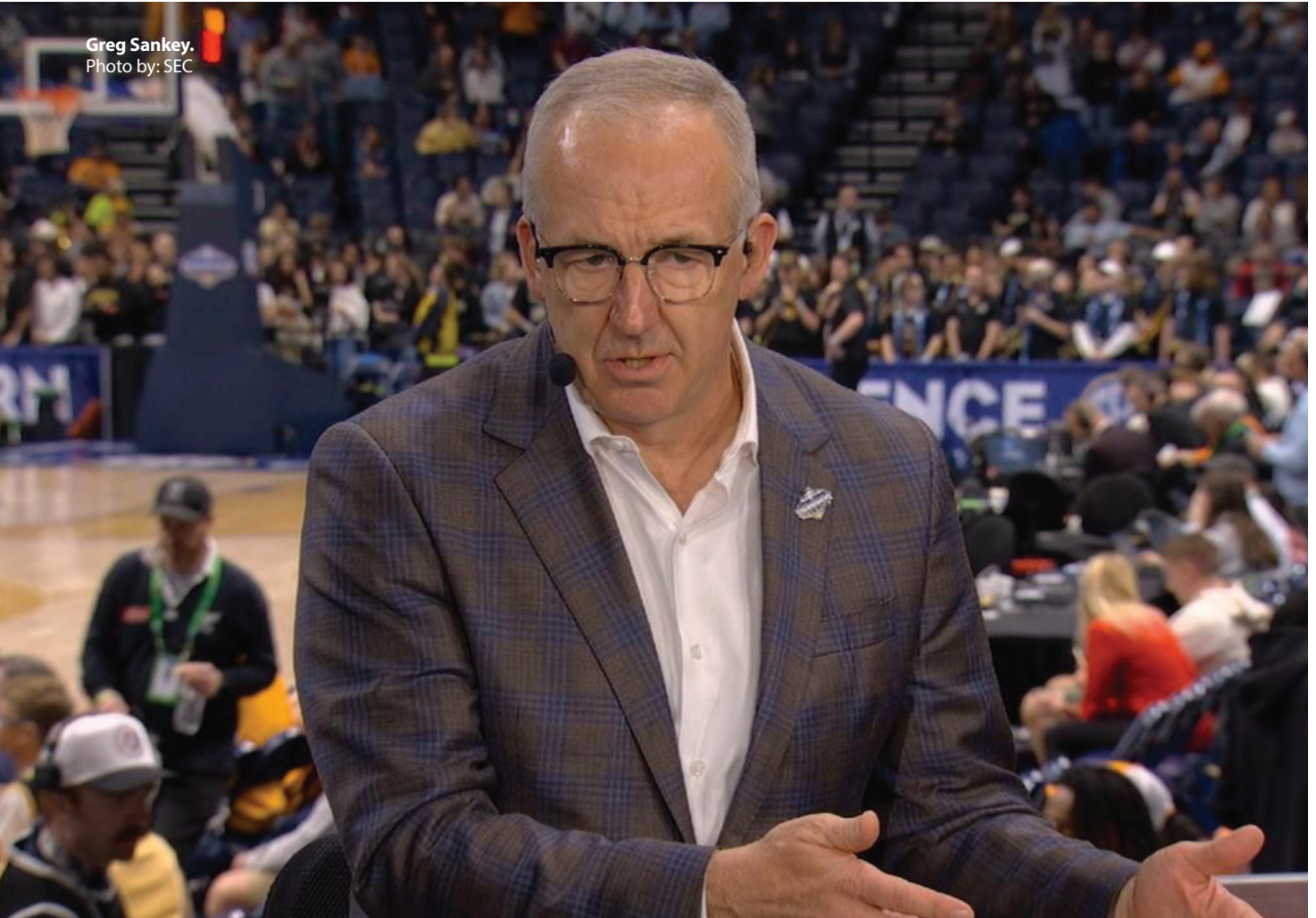
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Greg Sankey.  
Photo by: SEC



# Is SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey A Man With A Conference, But Without A Country?

While His Kingdom Crumbles, He Clings To Championship Game And Not Expanding Playoffs To 24

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Of all people, Brian Kelly was right on at the Southeastern Conference Spring Meetings one year ago in Miramar Beach, Florida.

“Look, the Big Ten right now holds it on the SEC,” Kelly said with that wry,

smart-alecky grin grin. “They won the last two national championships, OK. That’s the reality of it. We want to get challenged in that regard. We’d like to be able to get that done.”

Kelly, who was fired five months later last season by LSU, was talking about how the SEC should be scheduling a Big Ten game each season. That hasn’t happened, and it may not be a good idea. Because the Big Ten is suddenly what the SEC used to be – as in it means more.

Indiana, which SEC people ridiculed for being let into the 2024 College Football Playoff, became the third straight Big Ten team to win the national championship last season after Michigan in the two previous seasons.

Meanwhile, the Big Ten has been bringing in millions and millions more money for its members than the SEC for decades. And its commissioner Tony Petitti is more forward thinking. A Harvard Law School graduate, he worked at a major law firm in New York City before becoming vice-president at ABC for programming and senior vice-president at CBS before heading up the Major League Baseball Network from 2008-20.

Sankey went to Cayuga Community College and Syracuse and worked at Utica College and Northwestern State in Natchitoches before compliance work at the SEC office and waiting his turn. Previous SEC commissioner Mike Slive was more like Petitti as he was a lawyer and judge before becoming Conference-USA commissioner. Former SEC commissioner Roy Kramer was an athletic director at Vanderbilt before SEC commissioner. They all had leadership positions. Sankey did not.

Sankey has done a great job in several areas at the SEC, but he may now be over his head.

Petitti and ACC and Big 12 commissioners are for the 24-team playoff, which makes sense. But Sankey is stubborn. He is more for a move from 12 to 16 and keeping his long-archaic SEC Championship Game. It makes close to \$100 million a year, but without it the SEC could make nearly as much with more teams in the playoffs and eventually exceed the losses. ESPN is tied to that game, but everything's negotiable. Alabama athletic director Greg Byrne rightfully came out publicly against the SEC title game recently.

The regular season could be limited to 11 games with more postseason.

Sankey says all the right things, but he resists progress. The SEC and the Big Ten still have the power with the CFP contract going through 2032, but Petitti seems to be grabbing more power with other leaders siding with him over Sankey.

"We're open to the conversation," Sankey said in his typical parliamentary procedure sort of way of a move to 24. "But there are a lot of ideas out there that have to be

supported with analysis and information, not speculation."

Meanwhile, Sankey's own league coaches like Georgia's Kirby Smart and Tennessee's Josh Heupel like 24 playoff teams.

Gradually, Sankey is getting outnumbered by his own conference coaches and power brokers.

"There are those who say, 'We want more opportunities in the playoffs,'" Sankey said. "That's not where everybody is."

I

don't know if Sankey knows "where everybody is" in his own conference.

Sankey tends to behave like a governmental official hiding behind bureaucracy and putting decisions off.

"The shot clock is not expiring," he said recently since the 2027-28 playoff format doesn't have to be decided upon until later this year.

But it may be expiring on Sankey. **TR**

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 YOUR NUMBERS  
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 Match any of YOUR NUMBERS to any of the WINNING NUMBERS, win prize shown.  
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Warren Morris  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# One Moment In Time:

## Q&A With Warren Morris On Ultimate Home Run For The Ages

“It’s Just Neat How The Moment Lives On”

*(Reprinted from July, 2023, Tiger Rag Magazine)*

By WILLIAM WEATHERS

He was an unlikely candidate to become the next LSU athletic icon.

Warren Morris was a former walk-on infielder who red-shirted his first season in 1993 while legendary coach

Skip Bertman guided the Tigers to the national championship.

He waited his turn behind All-American second baseman Todd Walker, who left for the Major League draft

following the 1994 season. Morris was a second team All-American and member of the U.S. National team, coached by Bertman, in 1995. He hit .369 with eight homers, 50 RBIs and 18 stolen bases that season, creating big

expectations for the Alexandria native in 1996.

Unfortunately, a broken hamate bone in his wrist nearly cost him all of that junior season. He did not return until the NCAA Regional round. And you know the rest of the story. On national championship Saturday on June 8, his two-run home run with two outs in the bottom of the ninth beat Miami, 9-8.

Morris sat down with Tiger Rag to discuss the moment shortly after LSU won its seventh national championship, 18-4 over Florida, on June 26, 2023.

**Tiger Rag:** You must be smiling from ear to ear?

**Warren Morris:** “I have been. It’s been a fun day. A lot of people excited about the championship. It’s fun to be an LSU baseball fan right now.”

**TR:** What are your memories from the homer in 1996?

**Morris:** “My wife and I have three daughters now, and the oldest twin daughters will be freshman in a few months at LSU. They’ve seen the video and to them it’s just dad. They do think it’s cool whenever fans come up and take pictures and talk about where they were. The greatest thing to me is I love having my place in LSU baseball history. Over the 27 years, you can’t imagine how many people have come up to me to say hello and say what they were doing and share their story. It’s cool over the years that I’ve gotten to meet all these people and hear all of these great stories. LSU fans just have a passion. For them to come up and share with me their story, that’s just special to me.”

**TR:** What did you think going into the 1996 season?

**Morris:** “I had a little bit of a leg up because that ’93 season I got to red-shirt. I got to go to practice and see what Todd Walker did, saw how Russ Johnson prepared every day, and see Mike Sirotko and those guys, who were phenomenal players that led to that ’93 national championship. That helped a lot of us freshmen in ’93. Like, ‘Hey we can win this. We just have to go do it.’ In ’94, we went to Omaha, two and out. In ’95, we lost our regional

and didn’t even go. We felt collectively like this was our chance to leave our legacy. In ’96, we put it together.”

**TR:** How much did this year’s team remind you of teams from your era?

**Morris:** “It was huge just the way they were able to bond together, just get along so well. Once I heard that, with the level of talent they had, I thought they had a chance to win it all.”

**TR:** Has anyone ever said they named their son after you?

**Morris:** “I have, believe it or not. To make me feel older, their son is about in high school. It’s cool because the moment gets to live on, even on YouTube. People can pull it up. High school players who weren’t even alive when I did it, they can be excited about it. It’s just neat how the moment lives on.” **TR**

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THE SITDOWN

PRESENTED BY



Chris Smith  
Photo by: Chris Smith

# The Man Behind The Lane Kiffin Vanity Fair Piece

Chris Smith Talks About His Feature On The  
LSU Coach That Went Viral And Then Some

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Vanity Fair writer Chris Smith spent part of his day in Baton Rouge last April before interviewing LSU football coach Lane Kiffin at Poor Boy Lloyd's for lunch.

"And I picked up a copy right inside the door of the **Tiger Rag** money issue," Smith said of the March, 2026, magazine on **Tiger Rag Radio** recently. That issue's headline said, "**Inside The Fiscal Fight**" and delved into the LSU athletic department's projected \$30 million deficit and the expected \$40 million cost of Kiffin's new roster that includes 41 from the portal.

"That helped with my research," Smith said. "And then the first thing he does when I get to his office is say, 'Here.' And he hands me a **Tiger Rag Magazine** and says, 'This has a bunch of details that I didn't even know.' It had a blow-by-blow of his arrival. So, thanks for the help. Lane Kiffin is not just a **Tiger Rag** subject, but a reader."

Excerpts from the **Tiger Rag Radio** interview of Smith on May 12 appear here after his piece on Kiffin was published on May 11:

**TIGER RAG:** What was your question to Lane Kiffin that led to him saying in the Vanity Fair article that families of recruits from out of state didn't want those recruits going to Ole Miss because of its racial past and current images?

(Kiffin says in the article that when he was coaching at Ole Miss, "top recruits would tell him, 'Hey, coach, we really like you, but my grandparents aren't letting me move to Oxford, Mississippi.'" Kiffin is then quoted, "That doesn't come up when you say Baton

Rouge, Louisiana. Parents were sitting here saying the LSU campus diversity feels so great. 'It feels like there's no segregation. And we want that for our kid because that's the real world.' This is factual. They're not shots.")

**CHRIS SMITH:** I had asked him about the factors that went into his decision to leave Ole Miss for LSU. Did he think the ceiling would be higher at LSU? He started with some conventional reasons like the money available

for LSU and its allies for the portal roster. He said, "It was adult money." Then he started talking about the images of the two places. And he volunteered to my surprise that anecdote about black recruits and their families regularly telling him, "We like you coach, but my grandparents are not going to let me come to Oxford." And he said he's not going to have that problem in Baton Rouge. I wish I could say it was *(continued next page)*

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## THE SITDOWN

some genius question that I used to pull it out of him. But no.

**TIGER RAG:** And you were not thinking of that answer?

**CHRIS SMITH:** I was not. And I was really intrigued by it. Obviously, there has been a great deal of discussion about it the past two days. One of the things that struck me immediately was not simply the factual merits of the relative racial histories of the two towns or schools. But that I found it fascinating that he was sending a message, pretty transparently, that this was an angle that he was going to work at recruiting players on behalf of LSU.

**TIGER RAG:** What was the story pitch to your editor for the story?

**CHRIS SMITH:** Like millions of sports fans, I watched the drama unfold last November with Kiffin ditching Ole Miss and

coming to LSU. That was plenty intriguing in and of itself. But the whole episode really seemed to strike a nerve with even casual fans. And I was curious about that. Why there was such an outsized reaction, and some of it seemed to be that this was being maneuvered by a bunch of insiders. You had agent Jimmy Sexton pulling strings and negotiating deals. You had Nick Saban on TV campaigning for Kiffin to be allowed to keep coaching, even if he was leaving Ole Miss. And that kind of thing grates on people.

Also, it is within the context of drastic changes in college sports, where because of the portal and NIL, stability has disappeared and loyalty has eroded. And even people who understand that college sports have long been a big business, that still troubles them, where they wish it wasn't that way. And Kiffin became something of a symbol of all those changes, the

excesses of those changes. Another thing that was intriguing to me is that people frequently become centers of media storms, and caricatures. And I'm always curious. Who is that person? Often people are more complicated than the stereotype or caricature makes them out to be.

And so that was my pitch to my editors at Vanity Fair, and that it seemed to resonate on a lot of levels. It's about money. It's about power. And it's about who is this guy who people think they know because he's been in a lot of headlines. But who is he really? And what's going through his head? I talked to my best friend who lives in Slidell. He's a big LSU fan, college football fan, and he told me he felt like he learned a lot in this story about what created Lane Kiffin. Not just biographically, but about the context of college sports sort of produced him.

# POWERING A WORLD THAT'S ALWAYS ON.



ALWAYS ON

**TIGER RAG:** How comfortable do you think he is being the face of the transfer portal?

**CHRIS SMITH:** He is pretty comfortable being the face of most anything. I don't think he thinks of it that way. I think he's extraordinarily comfortable and really well built for this era, where it's borderline chaos. And you're recruiting 12 months of the year to keep guys on the roster and to bring in new players. And the fact that he's willing to mix it up on social media and promote himself and be something of a celebrity beyond the sports world. That's all really well suited to this era in the game.

**TIGER RAG:** How many football coaches have been on the cover of Vanity Fair?

*"I think he (Lane Kiffin) is extraordinarily comfortable and really well built for this era, where it's borderline chaos. And you're recruiting 12 months of the year to keep guys on the roster and to bring in new players. And the fact that he's willing to mix it up on social media and promote himself and be something of a celebrity beyond the sports world."*

-Vanity Fair writer  
Chris Smith

**CHRIS SMITH:** I'm going to go out on a limb and say zero. You spend a lot of time trying to convince people to talk

with you. But Kiffin, once I got in the room with him, was willing to keep going and answer any question. And even as this controversy has happened, he hasn't tried to do the thing that many do, "Oh, that was off the record." Or any of that. Whether you think what he said was on target or not, it was just me and him in the room. He had no press person holding his hand.

**TIGER RAG:** How hard was it to get the interview?

**CHRIS SMITH:** The main thing was he was just kind of busy. The one thing I give him credit for is he doesn't resort to the athletic cliché of, "I don't pay attention to what's written or said about me." Kiffin is up front that he's paying attention to EVERYTHING. **TR**



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# 2026 LSU FOOTBALL TRAVEL GUIDE

**LSU FANS WILL BE SEC ROAD TRIPPIN' LIKE NEVER BEFORE**

**A**n issue for LSU football fans entering the 2026 season centers on the approaching record gas prices because of the war with Iran that President Trump said would last "four to five weeks."

But instead of half a college football season, the war stretched into its fourth month in June.

If it is still going by Saturday, Sept. 19, it still won't stop LSU fans from motoring to Oxford, Mississippi, even if gas is \$6 or \$7 a gallon.

For that Saturday is Louisiana-Mississippi Armageddon - LSU and coach Lane Kiffin Vs. Ole Miss - that school Kiffin used to coach and made better longer than any time since the early 1960s ... when gas prices were 30 cents a gallon.

ABC will televise that hate fest at 6:30 p.m.

That will be the first of a record five SEC road trips for LSU with the league schedule moving to nine games for the first time.

After Ole Miss, LSU will be at Kentucky Oct. 10 for the first time since a 42-21 loss in 2021. On Oct. 24, the Tigers play at Auburn for the first time since a 21-17 win in 2022. LSU will play at Tennessee Nov. 21 for the first time since winning 30-10 in 2017.

The Tigers end the regular season at Arkansas Nov. 28 in Fayetteville.

Happy Motoring, or flying.

# OXFORD, MISSISSIPPI SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

**VAUGHT-HEMINGWAY STADIUM  
SEATING CAPACITY - 64,038**

## LSU AT OLE MISS

Not since Nov. 22, 2003, when No. 3 LSU (9-1, 5-1 SEC) and coach Nick Saban traveled to No. 15 Ole Miss (8-2, 6-0 SEC) with quarterback Eli Manning has there been a bigger game in LSU-Ole Miss history.

That was for the West title, which LSU took with a 17-14 win and 55-24 next over Arkansas before winning its first national championship since 1958.

This is huge for another reason – revenge. Ole Miss Nation hasn't seen straight since losing coach Lane Kiffin to LSU after six years, following the 2025 regular season. Kiffin was the most successful coach it had since Johnny Vaught (1947-70), who won six SEC titles and three disputed national titles. Kiffin had four double-digit win seasons in his last five seasons. No coach after Vaught had more than one, and there were only three in all.

This will be the earliest LSU-Ole Miss game ever on the calendar, so don't get too mad if your team loses. You will have virtually an entire season to make up for it.

## THINGS TO DO

The Square in downtown Oxford is the coolest pregame, postgame, no game place to be in the SEC. Start off at Square Books (160 Courthouse Square), an incredibly awesome bookstore. Ask the owner or an employee why they don't carry "Everything Matters In Baseball: The Skip Bertman Story." Just kidding.

Great restaurants/bars are everywhere you turn on the street called Courthouse Square - City Grocery at 152, Ajax Diner at 118, Oxford Bouré at 110, upscale McEwen's Oxford off the Square at 1110 Van Buren.

Don't miss one of the best cigar lounges – Spring Street Cigars, 415 South Lamar just off the Square. Great place to unwind after a game while watching another.

## AT A GLANCE

### DRIVE TIME

345 MILES  
5 HOURS

**FLIGHT PRICE  
FROM BATON ROUGE**  
\$437

**WHERE TO STAY**  
HOLIDAY INN  
EXPRESS & SUITES: OXFORD

**WHERE TO EAT**  
BOURE RESTAURANT

**WHERE TO SHOP**  
THE DEPOT ANTIQUE MALL

**WHERE TO PARTY**  
LIBRARY SPORTS BAR



Brian Kelly (left) greets Lane Kiffin before 2025 game. Photo by: LSU Athletics

# LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY OCTOBER 10, 2026

**KROGER FIELD**  
**SEATING CAPACITY - 61,000**

## LSU AT KENTUCKY

The Tigers return to Lexington for the first time since 2021 when the No. 16 Wildcats gave coach Ed Orgeron's Tigers their worst loss of the year, 42-21, and Coach O was fired effective at the end of the regular season a few days later.

LSU leads the series, 16-12, in Lexington, but it has not won there since the Blue Grass Miracle on Nov. 9, 2002, 33-30 on the last play of the game. With Kentucky fans already celebrating and walking on the field, LSU quarterback Marcus Randall threw a desperation heave that Devery Henderson somehow caught in stride after multiple tips by Wildcats and ran the rest of the way for a 74-yard TD.

No. 1 LSU was upset at No. 16 Kentucky, 43-37, in triple overtime in the next meeting in 2007, but coach Les Miles' Tigers still went on to win the national championship.

## THINGS TO DO

Lexington is known for Kentucky Wildcat basketball, but no town in America better combines horse racing and college football on Saturdays than this one. With the game on Oct. 10, horse racing at Keeneland will be in season. If the Tigers draw a night game, you can bet on the horses all day and watch other games on the big screens at The Hill at Keeneland before the football game at Kroger Field 15 minutes away.

Make sure you hit Winchell's for breakfast at 348 Southland Drive. For later, try the KS Bar and Grille sports bar extraordinaire at 1030 South Broadway. One of the best dive bars in the SEC is the Chevy Chase Inn at 833 Euclid Avenue. There are a host of bourbon trails for the taking as well as the Lexington Distillery District on Manchester Street northwest of downtown.

## AT A GLANCE

### DRIVE TIME

801 MILES  
11 HOURS, 34 MINUTES

**FLIGHT PRICE**  
**FROM BATON ROUGE**  
\$309

**WHERE TO STAY**  
THE MANCHESTER

**WHERE TO EAT**  
CARSON'S FOOD & DRINK

**WHERE TO SHOP**  
FAYETTE MALL

**WHERE TO PARTY**  
GEORGIE'S SOCIAL PLACE



LSU's Devery Henderson after game-winning TD catch in 2002. Photo by: LSU Athletics

# AUBURN, ALABAMA

## OCTOBER 24, 2026

**JORDAN-HARE STADIUM**  
**SEATING CAPACITY - 87,451**

### LSU AT AUBURN

A casualty of the SEC expansion and schedule changes for LSU fans was the trip to Auburn every other year, which happened from 1992 through 2023. Who can forget the Fire Game of Sept. 21, 1996? An LSU tailgater barbecuing too close to the old Auburn Sports Arena, known as “The Barn” and located close to Jordan-Hare Stadium, accidentally let the embers from a small grill go unextinguished. That literally started a Barn Burner. With flames lighting up the night sky, LSU won 19-15. At times, it looked like Jordan-Hare was on fire, but the flames never got very close.

Auburn leads the series at Auburn, 12-10. LSU won the last meeting there on Oct. 1, 2022, 21-17. Perhaps the most famous LSU game at Jordan-Hare was Auburn’s 30-26 win in 1994. LSU led 23-9 entering the fourth, but quarterback Jamie Howard threw five interceptions in the period with three returned for TDs.

### THINGS TO DO

A great halfway stop from New Orleans or Baton Rouge to Auburn is Mobile, Alabama, which is close to Fairhope and Gulf Shores. So, you can make a beach-football trip out of it, particularly with the game during that crisp and cool October time of year. Montgomery is also a strategic spot to sleep over the night before the game as it is just 55 miles from Auburn and an easier place to find a hotel room.

While in the Mobile area, experience the Original Oyster House at 3733 Battleship Parkway in Spanish Fort or The Oyster City Brewing Company at 600 Government Street. If you have time while in Montgomery, don’t miss the Hank Williams Museum at 118 Commerce Street. The Central Restaurant at 129 Coosa Street offers upscale dining. Or try the more casual Dreamland Ribs at 12 West Jefferson Street downtown.

### AT A GLANCE

#### DRIVE TIME

421 MILES  
6 HOURS, 7 MINUTES

**FLIGHT PRICE  
FROM BATON ROUGE**  
\$339

**WHERE TO STAY**  
THE LAUREL HOTEL & SPA

**WHERE TO EAT**  
THE HOUND

**WHERE TO SHOP**  
AUBURN MALL

**WHERE TO PARTY**  
THE PLAINS TAPROOM & GRILL



“The Barn” at Auburn burns during 1996 game vs. LSU. Photo by: Auburn University

# KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE NOVEMBER 21, 2026

NEYLAND STADIUM  
SEATING CAPACITY - 101,915

## LSU AT TENNESSEE

LSU has played at Tennessee fewer times than any other original SEC school except for Georgia. The Tigers play in Knoxville for just the 16th time this season and trail there 11-4-1. LSU has played in Athens, Georgia, only 14 times. The Tigers have not played in Neyland Stadium since a 30-10 win in 2017. The only other LSU wins there were 38-7 in 2011, 28-24 in 2006 and 34-9 in 1988.

It was Tennessee that ruined LSU's best chance in its history at back-to-back national championships with a 14-13 win by the No. 13 Vols over No. 1 LSU on Nov. 7, 1959. The week before, No.1 LSU (11-0 in 1958) won its 18th straight game, 7-3, over No. 3 Ole Miss in a Game of the Century on Billy Cannon's 89-yard punt return on Halloween Night at Tiger Stadium. But Cannon was kept out of the end zone in the final seconds on Rocky Top by a call disputed for nearly 70 years.

## THINGS TO DO

Calhoun's On The River – the Tennessee River that is – offers the ultimate pregame dining spot at 400 Neyland Drive as it is just across the street from Neyland Stadium. For upscale dining and a taste of history with an 1870s theme and craft cocktails, try The Kennedy at 430 South Gay Street. There is also the Lonesome Dove Western Bistro at 100 Nort Central Street.

The Women's Basketball Hall of Fame at 700 Hall of Fame Drive would be a great place to tour on the day of the game. And don't forget to check out The Vol Navy on the Tennessee River, where you can view football the tradition of "sailgating" as fans dock their various boats just outside Neyland Stadium.

## AT A GLANCE

### DRIVE TIME

656 MILES  
9 HOURS, 31 MINUTES

**FLIGHT PRICE  
FROM BATON ROUGE**  
\$354

**WHERE TO STAY**  
CUMBERLAND HOUSE

**WHERE TO EAT**  
STOCK & BARREL

**WHERE TO SHOP**  
MAST GENERAL STORE

**WHERE TO PARTY**  
TERN CLUB



Billy Cannon and LSU came up just short in 1959 at Tennessee. Photo by: LSU Athletics

# FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS NOVEMBER 28, 2026

**DONALD W. REYNOLDS RAZORBACK STADIUM**  
**SEATING CAPACITY - 76,212**

## LSU AT ARKANSAS

The Tigers have won five straight in Fayetteville and lead on the Arkansas campus, 6-2. Arkansas' last home win over LSU was 17-0 on Nov. 15, 2014, on a cold, blustery day in northwest Arkansas, which it always seems to be when LSU plays there late in seasons. LSU's most costly loss there was on Nov. 29, 2002, when the Razorbacks won 21-20 on a 31-yard touchdown pass from Matt Jones to DeCori Birmingham in the final seconds to send the Razorbacks to the SEC Championship Game in Atlanta.

Had LSU won, it would have played in its first SEC title game, which it did make the next season on its way to the national championship. Three of LSU's last five wins at Arkansas have been decided by a touchdown or less - 13-10 in 2022, 27-24 in 2020 and 24-17 in 2018. LSU won the last one in Fayetteville, 34-10, in 2024.

## THINGS TO DO

This was a more fun game when it was played in Little Rock from 1994 through 2010 as it was a much easier drive from Louisiana with more to do in the Arkansas capital. But Fayetteville has a lot to offer. Doe's Eat Place at 316 West Dickson Street has the best steaks, though this is not the original. That's in Greenville, Mississippi. Right next door is Bordino's Restaurant and Wine Bar that is another top choice. And go down a block to 519 Dickson, and you'll be at George's Majestic Lounge - the oldest music venue in Arkansas "serving thirsty ears since 1927." Leon Russell, Robert Cray and Blues Traveler are among the acts to grace the stage.

TRAVEL TIP: A great town to visit that's easier to fly into than Fayetteville is Tulsa, Oklahoma - just a two-hour drive to Fayetteville.

## AT A GLANCE

### DRIVE TIME

896 MILES  
12 HOURS, 48 MINUTES

**FLIGHT PRICE  
FROM BATON ROUGE**  
\$369

**WHERE TO STAY**  
GRADUATE BY HILTON

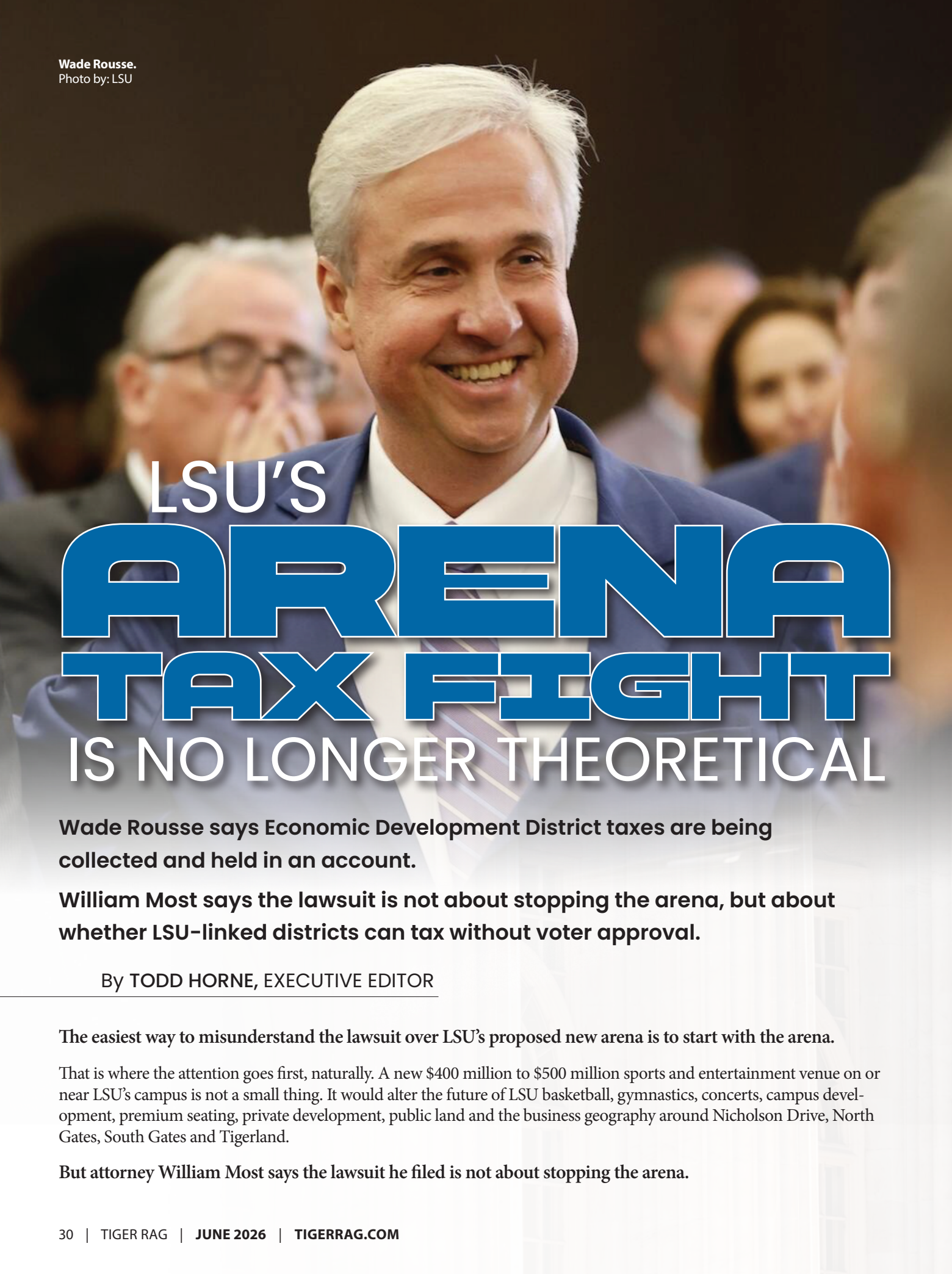
**WHERE TO EAT**  
HUGO'S

**WHERE TO SHOP**  
THE SHOPS AT BRICKCITY

**WHERE TO PARTY**  
MAXINE'S TAP ROOM



Arkansas' DeCori Birmingham beats LSU in 2002. Photo by: LSU Athletics



# LSU'S ARENA TAX FIGHT IS NO LONGER THEORETICAL

**Wade Rouse says Economic Development District taxes are being collected and held in an account.**

**William Most says the lawsuit is not about stopping the arena, but about whether LSU-linked districts can tax without voter approval.**

By TODD HORNE, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The easiest way to misunderstand the lawsuit over LSU's proposed new arena is to start with the arena.

That is where the attention goes first, naturally. A new \$400 million to \$500 million sports and entertainment venue on or near LSU's campus is not a small thing. It would alter the future of LSU basketball, gymnastics, concerts, campus development, premium seating, private development, public land and the business geography around Nicholson Drive, North Gates, South Gates and Tigerland.

But attorney William Most says the lawsuit he filed is not about stopping the arena.

That was the point he returned to at the Baton Rouge Press Club, where he addressed the lawsuit brought by his client, Darrell Glasper Sr., against the Louisiana State University Economic Development District and the LSU EDD Athletic Subdistrict.

“This lawsuit is not trying to stop the arena,” Most said. “It’s not saying the arena is bad. It’s not taking any position whether it’s good or bad.”

That clarification matters because the case is easy to flatten into a simple fight over whether LSU should build a new arena. It is not that simple. Most is framing the case as a challenge to a taxing mechanism, not as an anti-arena campaign. His argument is that if public tax money is going to be collected from businesses and customers around LSU and potentially used to support a privately developed arena, voters should have had a say.

Most put it in the oldest American language available.

“No taxation without representation,” he said.

The phrase can sound like a slogan. But the lawsuit turns on something more technical and potentially more consequential: whether LSU-linked entities used state-created economic development districts to impose new sales and hotel occupancy taxes in areas allegedly drawn or defined to exclude voters.

### **That is the machinery beneath the arena fight.**

The lawsuit, filed Dec. 17 in the 19th Judicial District Court, challenges the legality of the LSU Economic Development District and the LSU EDD Athletic Subdistrict. The petition alleges the districts were structured to raise taxes from businesses near LSU without allowing voters to approve or reject them. LSU had not returned messages seeking comment before Tiger Rag’s original story was published.

Most said there have been no major case updates since his Baton Rouge Press Club appearance. The defendants had not yet filed their formal response at the time of his remarks, and Most said the Attorney General’s Office had notified him it would represent the districts.

“We don’t really know what the defense is,” Most said.

That matters because LSU, the EDD and the Athletic Subdistrict may eventually argue that the structure was legal, authorized by the Legislature and carried out under Louisiana’s economic development district statutes. Most’s answer, in essence, is that legality cannot be reduced to whether the people in power found a pathway through

the statute. His position is that the pathway itself was used to cut voters out of a decision they had a right to make.

### **But the case is no longer theoretical.**

At his own Baton Rouge Press Club appearance, LSU President Wade Rouse confirmed the EDD taxes are being collected, said the money is now in an account and said nothing has been spent yet. Piper Hutchinson first reported for Louisiana Illuminator and Tiger Rag that Rouse said the LSU economic development district at the center of the lawsuit has begun receiving sales tax revenue, though it remains unclear whether that money will be used to fund the proposed arena.

Rouse rejected the phrase “arena taxes.”

“I wouldn’t characterize those as the arena taxes,” Rouse said.

But he confirmed the collections.

“There is an economic development district that is a much broader economic development district and an athletic district,” Rouse said. “Those taxes are being collected.”

That answer directly addressed one of the biggest questions raised after Most’s appearance: whether money was already coming in.

At the earlier Press Club event, Most had been asked whether both tax layers had started being collected and, if so, where the money was. His answer was striking because it was not dramatic. He did not know.

“I’ve heard that the taxes are being

collected, although I haven’t seen that directly,” Most said. “And the short answer is, I don’t know where the money is.”

Rouse has now answered part of that question.

He said LSU only recently completed the accounting structure for the money and that LSU Chief Financial Officer Brandi Roberts had been working to determine where the money stood.

“We have an account in place,” Rouse said. “There’s money in that account, whereas nothing has been spent yet.”

Rouse also said he personally had to sign onto the account as EDD president and provide identifying information as the account fiduciary.

“I had to actually sign on as the EDD president and give him my driver’s license and everything else as the fiduciary of that account,” Rouse said.

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**“We have an account in place. There’s money in that account, whereas nothing has been spent yet... Where it’s going to be spent kind of depends on if we end up getting an arena or not.”**

**– Wade Rouse**

**That is a significant development. It confirms the tax is not merely a future concern. Money is being collected. It is in an account. The LSU president says nothing has been spent.**

But Rouse's answer also opened new questions. He did not say how much has been collected. He did not specify whether both the LSU EDD tax and Athletic Subdistrict tax are currently being collected. He did not say where the account is held. He did not say whether the money is segregated by district. He did not say whether any of the revenue has been pledged, committed, escrowed or promised to any project, developer or future agreement.

**And he did not fully separate the money from the arena.**

"Where it's going to be spent kind of depends on if we end up getting an arena or not," Rouse said.

That sentence is the hinge.

LSU's position is that the EDD is broader than the arena. Rouse pointed to campus infrastructure needs, including potholes, curbs and broken concrete, as possible uses. Piper's story noted that Rouse said the funds may also be used on other infrastructure projects, including campus potholes.

"We have a lot of places to spend them," Rouse said.

That gives LSU a broader public-purpose argument. It can say the EDD money is not automatically arena money. It can say the district has infrastructure and economic-development purposes. It can say the arena is one potential piece of a larger development strategy.

But the arena question remains alive because Rouse also said the spending decision may depend on whether LSU gets the arena.

That is where the lawsuit's allegations become harder to dismiss as old paperwork or political rhetoric.

The petition alleges the LSU EDD was created to raise taxes on more than 100 businesses near LSU without voter approval and could collect approximately \$161 million in sales and hotel taxes over 30 years. The LSU EDD board approved a resolution declaring its intent to levy a 1% sales tax and 1% hotel occupancy tax beginning Oct. 1, 2025. The Baton Rouge Metro Council then approved the taxes, and the LSU EDD board later ratified and confirmed the sales and hotel occupancy tax. The Athletic Subdistrict later moved toward its own 1% sales tax and 1% hotel occupancy tax. The petition describes those actions in detail, including the LSU EDD board's

June and July tax actions, the Metro Council's Aug. 27 approval and the subdistrict's later tax process.

That is where the phrase "both cents" enters the case.

The petition quotes private communications attributed to attorney Charles Landry saying the arena project "gets both cents of new taxes" and that "has been the deal from day one." In plain English, "both cents" refers to two possible 1% tax layers: one from the LSU EDD and one from the Athletic Subdistrict.

**Most said the public story and the private documents do not match.**

He pointed to public statements by LSU EDD board members and representatives saying no use had been determined for the tax revenue. But in private communications, according to the lawsuit, the taxes were tied to the arena project.

"There's this giant mismatch between what they were telling the public that this tax money was going to be used for and then in private, there was this secret plan to use it for the arena," Most said.

Rouse did not say that all EDD tax money will go to the arena. He did not say the taxes are dedicated to Oak View Group. He did not say the lawsuit is correct.

**But he did acknowledge something important about the**

**arena's economics: the idea that the project would cost LSU nothing is not accurate.**

"The idea that it was going to not cost anything, I don't think is true," Rouse said.

**That is a major clarification from LSU's president.**

For months, the public appeal of a private arena structure has been easy to understand. LSU needs a modern replacement for the Pete Maravich Assembly Center. A private developer can build and operate it. LSU can use it for basketball, gymnastics and university events. Baton Rouge can get concerts and entertainment. The university can avoid directly paying the full construction cost.

Rouse's comments were more cautious.

He said LSU is still trying to determine the actual dollars needed to make the arena work and emphasized that the university does not want to pull money away from academics. Piper reported that Rouse said LSU is seeking additional funding for the arena, does not want to take money away from academics, and floated Louisiana Economic Development as one possible state-related

**"There's this giant mismatch between what they were telling the public that this tax money was going to be used for and then in private, there was this secret plan to use it for the arena."**

**- William Most**

funding source, while noting he was unsure what the source would be.

“We have no interest in a substitution effect of taking away from the academic side of the House,” Rouse said.

He also said LSU is still looking for funding sources.

“We’re still looking for funding sources,” Rouse said. “There’s still a lot of particulars that need to be worked out.”

That matters because it suggests the arena is not yet a fully solved financial equation. Rouse described the potential arena district as a major economic development project, saying LSU believes the broader development could exceed \$1 billion in economic activity. But he stopped short of saying the project is ready to move forward.

“Before I could say absolutely economically, I would say the marginal benefit outweighs the marginal costs,” Rouse said, “I would rather hedge my bet.”

His position was conditional. If the arena district benefits LSU, students, the university’s educational mission and the state, he said he would be for it. If not, LSU should not do it.

“If it truly is the economic development engine that we think it might be, and if it truly allows LSU to have control, as well as benefits our students and our educational mission, then I would be for it,” Rouse said.

That is a different tone from booster certainty. It is the language of an economist-president looking at a complicated deal he inherited and trying to quantify the costs, benefits and risks.

#### **It also gives the lawsuit a sharper public context.**

Most’s case is not simply asking whether LSU should build an arena. Rouse himself is not saying LSU should build the arena at any cost. The issue is whether the financial structure used to support the project, or potentially support it, was lawfully created and honestly explained.

Most said the origin of the LSU EDD was an effort to create a district that could raise money without requiring an election. He described a process in which LSU-related officials tried to draw a map around campus and nearby commercial areas while excluding residents.

“What they were trying to do was draw a map that would exclude any voters,” Most said. “Because if you can draw your squiggly lines in a way that avoids anywhere where anyone lives, then maybe you don’t have to have an election to approve a sales tax increase.”

But that idea ran into a practical problem.

#### **People live around LSU.**

“They kept running into the problem that people live there,” Most said. “There are people living in that area around LSU.”

The lawsuit alleges that after voters were identified inside proposed boundaries, the Legislature passed Act 203 of 2023, which created the LSU EDD and excluded residential properties from the district. Most argues that the exclusion was not merely an administrative detail. In his telling, it was the mechanism that allowed the district to contain businesses but no voters.

Businesses can collect taxes. Businesses can pay taxes. Businesses can be affected by taxes.

But businesses do not vote.

#### **That is the democratic gap at the center of the case.**

Most said the statute did not fully solve LSU’s problem because it excluded property used for residential purposes only as of the effective date of the act. That means, he argues, residential use after that date could create voters inside the district.

“People move,” Most said. “Just because there weren’t any voters in 2023 on a particular date doesn’t mean that you can be confident that there’s nobody there now.”

#### **This may sound like a technical argument. It is. But technical arguments are often where tax cases live or die.**

The lawsuit also argues the district boundaries are legally uncertain because a property’s status depends not simply on where it sits on a map, but on whether it was being used for residential purposes at a specific point in 2023. That means a business owner, buyer, taxpayer or public official could have trouble knowing with certainty whether a particular property is inside the district.

Most used Louie’s Cafe as an example.

“If you want to buy that piece of property and have a different business on it, you might want to know, am I going to be subject to these 2% sales taxes?” Most said. “There’s no way for you to know whether you’re in the district or out of the district, because you won’t know if someone was living in the back room in June 2023.”

That example matters because it translates the lawsuit from constitutional theory into business reality. A 1% or 2% sales tax may not sound massive in a political debate. But for restaurants, bars, small retailers and service businesses operating on thin margins, a few percentage points

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**“The idea that it was going to not cost anything, I don’t think is true.”**

**– Wade Rouse**

can matter. And for customers, every added tax becomes part of the bill.

Glasper alleges he is subject to the tax because he eats breakfast at Louie's Coffee, which is inside the district.

That is the plaintiff's hook. He is not a business owner suing over a theoretical tax structure. He is a taxpayer claiming he is paying a tax that should never have been imposed without voter approval.

**The case also raises a less discussed but potentially powerful challenge: whether the LSU EDD board itself was legally composed.**

Act 203 requires two members of the board to be representatives from businesses within the district. The lawsuit alleges the board has only one clear representative from a business inside the district: Clarke Cadzow, owner of Highland Coffees.

Asked at the Press Club whether two EDD board members must represent businesses within the district, Most said yes.

"You're right, that is a requirement," Most said. "We've looked at these board members, tried to figure out if there are two that could be fairly described as representatives of businesses within the district as required by the law."

The lawsuit names the board members as John Engquist, Robert Stuart, Rhoman Hardy, Matt Lee and Cadzow. At the time, Lee was serving as interim LSU president and, under Act 203's structure, chaired the LSU EDD board. Stuart was president of the LSU Foundation and chair of LSU's Real Estate & Facilities Foundation. The petition alleges H&E Equipment Services has no locations in the district, Bernhard Capital Partners' office is outside the district, and Stuart is not a representative of a for-profit business inside the district.

That board-composition issue may not sound as dramatic as "secret arena tax," but it could become one of the cleaner legal questions in the case.

If the law required two district-business representatives and the board did not have them, then a court could be asked to determine whether the board had authority to take the actions it took: creating the subdistrict, approving taxes and advancing related resolutions.

**That is not a slogan. That is statutory compliance.**

The lawsuit also raises a constitutional claim involving Louisiana's prohibition against gratuitous donations of public funds. In simple terms, government cannot give

away public money, property or things of value to a private party without receiving equivalent value in return.

Most said that principle is central to the case if tax revenue is being directed to a private arena developer.

"Government can't give its stuff away to private actors," Most said. "There's got to be something in exchange that the government entity gets if it gives something to a private person."

The proposed land structure makes that issue sharper.

The lawsuit alleges the arena entity would execute a 50-year ground sublease with the LSU EDD Athletic Subdistrict for rights to the 30-acre arena project site, with additional options. It also alleges the Athletic Subdistrict would receive rent from Oak View Group, the private arena developer.

Under a normal landlord-tenant arrangement, the tenant pays the landlord.

"Usually the tenant pays money to the landlord," Most said. "That's part of the problem here."

If the developer is leasing land from the Athletic Subdistrict, Most argues, then any flow of tax money back toward the developer raises an obvious public-purpose question: What is the district getting in return?

Rousse's likely answer, based on his Press Club comments, is that LSU is evaluating whether the

broader project creates enough economic-development value, student-experience value and institutional value to justify moving forward.

He described a possible world in which students have a better experience inside an LSU-controlled economic development district on campus instead of going elsewhere to socialize. He said LSU is "sitting on top of the EDD" and can control what the district might look like.

"I can imagine a world in my mind where our students have a better experience in an economic development district that's located right on our campus," Rousse said.

That is LSU's public-benefit argument. It is also the reason the case matters beyond one arena.

Across the country, universities are increasingly looking at campus land not merely as property to preserve, but as property to monetize. Stadiums and arenas are no longer viewed only as game-day venues. They are anchors for districts: hotels, restaurants, retail, condominiums, parking, premium hospitality, research space, event space and year-round entertainment.

**"Government can't give its stuff away to private actors. There's got to be something in exchange that the government entity gets if it gives something to a private person."**

**- William Most**

**But the University of Tennessee shows why the details matter.**

Tennessee is moving forward with its Neyland Stadium entertainment district, but the project is structured differently from what LSU is accused of doing in Baton Rouge. Tennessee awarded the project to the 865 Neyland Project Team, a private development group consisting of experts in real estate development and sports entertainment led by Dixon Greenwood, with Jake Miller, Taylor Gray, Hartland Hotel Group and Johnson Architecture. UT described the project as a public-private partnership to develop an entertainment district along the Tennessee River north waterfront near Neyland Stadium.

The Tennessee project is not built around a new campus sales-tax district. It is built around private development on valuable university-controlled land.

**That distinction matters.**

Tennessee's model uses Neyland Stadium's location and the surrounding campus real estate as the asset. Private developers take on the development and operating risk. UT says the district would include nearly 175,000 square feet of entertainment district space, replacement parking at G10, and a condotel with approximately 240 rooms and 60 luxury condos.

By contrast, LSU is facing a lawsuit over whether its arena structure uses public taxing power to help support a privately developed project without direct voter approval.

That does not make Tennessee's model perfect or LSU's model illegal. But it gives the LSU fight a useful comparison.

Tennessee did not need to create a voterless taxing district to make its Neyland development attractive to private developers. LSU, according to the lawsuit, pursued a model that involved an LSU-controlled EDD, an Athletic Subdistrict, public land, private development, Metro Council-approved taxes and alleged private communications tying "both cents" of new tax revenue to the arena project.

There may be legitimate reasons LSU's project required a different structure. A new arena is different from an entertainment district and condotel. Baton Rouge is not Knoxville. The PMAC replacement may have more difficult economics. Oak View Group may have demanded a different revenue package. LSU may argue the tax district supports economic development,

infrastructure and public benefits that extend beyond the arena.

But the Tennessee comparison exposes the choice LSU made.

A university can monetize land by leasing it to private developers and receiving rent.

A university can structure a project so private developers bear most of the development risk.

A university can negotiate revenue-sharing and future ownership rights.

Or a university-linked district can impose taxes and potentially use those taxes to support project economics.

The first model is easier to explain to the public.

The second one is harder, especially when the district allegedly has no voters.

Rousse also addressed concerns about Oak View Group, which has been tied to legal controversy elsewhere. Asked whether LSU was dealing with a criminal organization, Rousse said he came into the process late and had similar concerns at first. He said he brought partners into the room and asked questions.

"I don't think we brand them as a criminal organization," Rousse said.

That is not a full defense of OVG's history. But it is LSU's public answer from its president:

concern was raised, LSU looked into it, and Rousse is not prepared to characterize the company that way.

**The broader issue remains the structure.**

The modern SEC is not just competing for coaches, recruits and facilities anymore. It is competing in real estate development. The schools with the most valuable land, strongest brands and most aggressive private partners are trying to convert game-day geography into year-round revenue.

Tennessee is doing it at Neyland.

Texas did it with Moody Center.

LSU is trying to do it with a new arena.

The question is not whether LSU should think that way. It should. LSU controls valuable land, has one of the strongest brands in college athletics and badly needs a modern arena solution.

The question is whether the mechanism LSU used can survive legal and public scrutiny.

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**"I can imagine a world in my mind where our students have a better experience in an economic development district that's located right on our campus."**

**- Wade Rousse**



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Most said that is why people beyond LSU should care. If this works, he argued, other public bodies could use similar structures to raise taxes without risking voter rejection.

“If this works, if these public officials have found a way to raise sales taxes without having to risk the voters saying no, will they do it again?” Most said.

There is already a related reason to pay attention. The same 2023 legislation that created the LSU EDD also created a similar economic development district for Southern University. That district is not part of Gasper’s lawsuit, but Most pointed to it as evidence that the LSU case may not be isolated.

The broader trend matters because college athletics is no longer just about teams, coaches and games. It is increasingly about real estate, media rights, donor vehicles, private foundations, NIL collectives, revenue sharing, naming rights, premium seating, public records, tax policy and state politics.

**The arena lawsuit sits directly inside that new world.**

**“If this works, if these public officials have found a way to raise sales taxes without having to risk the voters saying no, will they do it again?”**

**– William Most**

It is an LSU athletics story, but not a sports story in the old sense.

No one is debating a lineup, a play call, a recruiting ranking or a box score. This is about who controls the financial architecture around LSU athletics.

That is why the case matters even to people who do not care whether LSU builds a new arena.

If the taxes are legal, LSU and its affiliated entities may have found a powerful model for funding campus-adjacent development. If the taxes are illegal, the case could weaken or stop a financing structure tied to one of LSU’s most ambitious athletics projects. If the board was not properly constituted, the problem may be procedural. If the district boundaries are indeterminate, the problem may be structural. If the tax revenue has already been collected and held, the remedy may involve money already paid by businesses and customers. If tax proceeds were promised to a private developer, the gratuitous-donation issue could become central.

The lawsuit has not yet resolved any of those questions.

For now, it has exposed them.

Rousse has now answered one of them.

The money is being collected. An account exists. LSU says nothing has been spent. Rousse says he signed on as fiduciary.

**That is news.**

But the answer is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of the next one.

How much has been collected?

Are both tax layers active?

Which businesses are paying?

Is the money separated by district?

Who else has authority over the account?

Has any of it been pledged?

Will any of it be rebated?

Will any of it support the arena?

And if the arena really does depend on the money, why were voters not asked?

Most's answer is simple.

"If these taxes are vital to the project, then all the more reason that voters should have a say in it," he said.

**"If these taxes are vital to the project, then all the more reason that voters should have a say in it."**

**- William Most**

Rousse's answer is more conditional.

The EDD is broader than the arena. The money is unspent. LSU is still studying the economics. The arena will not be cost-free. LSU will not sacrifice academics. If the numbers work and the project benefits LSU, the students and the state, he is open to it.

That is where the fight now sits: between a plaintiff's attorney arguing that the tax structure itself is unlawful and an LSU president acknowledging the money is real, the project is not free and the final economics are still unresolved.

The arena may still move forward.

The lawsuit may fail.


LSU and the districts may eventually present a strong legal defense.

But the questions raised at back-to-back Baton Rouge Press Club appearances will not disappear simply because the arena is popular or because the financing structure is complicated.

The public money is being collected.

The district board either satisfied Act 203 or it did not.

The arena economics either work or they do not.

**And sooner or later, LSU will have to explain not only where the money is, but what it is ultimately for.** 



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Ahmad Hudson  
Photos by: Ruston High School



The Nation's No. 1 Tight End And 5-Star Prospect

# Ahmad Hudson Is Multi-Talented

And He Wants To Play For Will Wade And Lane Kiffin

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It has become increasingly difficult for major college athletes to play football and basketball, but recent five-star LSU football commitment Ahmad Hudson of Ruston High told Tiger Rag via Twitter recently that he is ready to do both.

Hudson, the No. 1 tight end in the nation by 247sports.com and On3.com, committed to LSU football coach Lane Kiffin on May 3 as the No. 2 player in the state.

He committed to LSU over USC, Alabama, Nebraska, Arizona State, Missouri and Kentucky, among others.

But Hudson (6-foot-6, 239 pounds) is also one of the top basketball recruits in the country. And new LSU basketball coach Will Wade has shown interest.

Some recruiting websites are even counting Hudson as a double commitment to LSU football and basketball, even though if he signs with LSU, he will be on football scholarship and technically a basketball walk-on.

The way Hudson sees it, he is counting himself at LSU as a multi-commitment.

“Count me in,” were his exact words in response to Tiger Rag’s tweet about a recent story about him.

“LSU gave me the opportunity to look at what is best for me and with what I want to do with the two-sport aspect,” Hudson said during a YouTube interview with “Louisiana Vs. All Y’all.”

There was clearly talk of him playing both sports on May 2 when Hudson was named the Class AAAAA player of the year for the second time by the Louisiana Association of Basketball Coaches (LABC) at the Marriott in Baton Rouge.

In basketball last season, he averaged 19.7 points, 13.4 rebounds and 2.7 blocked shots this past season in leading Ruston High to the Division I non-select state finals. He was previously named Mr. Basketball in the state.

“He wants to play both, but it will be difficult,” Ahmad’s father Antonio Hudson said at the LABC banquet. Hudson is the basketball coach at Lincoln Prep, formerly Grambling High, in Grambling and was at the banquet for his

son and to receive the Class A coach of the year award for the second time. The elder Hudson led Lincoln to the Class A Division IV select state title last season at 30-3. It was the school’s first state championship in 34 years.

*“We’re good friends. I beat him in the playoffs in both sports. He isn’t going to like that. I wish I would have the opportunity to play with him in 2027. But if he does leave for the (NFL) draft, I can step in and go from there.”*

*- LSU tight end/basketball commitment Ahmad Hudson on LSU tight end Trey’Dez Green*

Antonio Hudson is a former LSU guard, who played for the Tigers from 2002-05 under coach John Brady, who was also at the banquet as he was inducted into the LABC Hall of Fame. Brady has been the game analyst for LSU basketball games on the LSU Radio Network since 2017 when Wade first took over as the Tigers’ basketball coach. Wade begins his second term this season after LSU fired him because of recruiting violations in 2022 and he went on to coach at McNeese State and North Carolina State.

Wade would like nothing better than to add Hudson to his 2026-27 LSU roster, which he has struggled to put together. As of mid-May, Wade had only four players on his roster, which was significantly less than the number of assistant coaches and other staff he has hired.

LSU has had football-basketball players in the past, but only briefly. When two Baton Rouge elite recruits –

6-foot-4 tight end Marcus Spears (later moved to defensive end) of Southern Lab and 6-3 wide receiver Michael Clayton of Christian Life Academy – signed with football coach Nick Saban’s 2001 class, both said they would play basketball at LSU for Brady.

Neither ended up playing basketball, but they did lead the football team its first national championship since 1958 in the 2003 season.

LSU 6-5 tight end Robert Royal (1998-2001) of Edna Karr High in New Orleans played basketball for Brady in January of 2001 for five games, scoring 10 points with six rebounds in 37 minutes. But he soon returned to football for spring drills.

Chris Carrier, a 6-5 safety from 1984-87 for LSU from Eunice High, played on the basketball team for coach Dale Brown in the 1985-86 season when the roster was depleted by a chicken pox epidemic and other injuries. That team still somehow reached the Final Four.

“It’s been a dream of mine to play both sports at LSU since I was a kid,” Hudson told Louisiana Vs. All Y’all.

He has been particularly intrigued by Kiffin’s offense.

“Looking at what coach Kiffin has done with tight ends who are not the same caliber as me and turned them into the players that I can be,” Hudson said. “I just imagine what he can do with me now. Can’t wait to see what they do with Trey’Dez. I’ll be at all the home games.”

That is 6-7 LSU junior tight end Trey’Dez Green of Zachary High that Hudson is talking about. Green also was a basketball star in high school and played briefly for the Tigers in January and February of the 2024-25 season. But like others before him, that did not last.

“We’re good friends,” Hudson said. “I beat him in the playoffs in both sports. He isn’t going to like that. I wish I would have the opportunity to play with him in 2027. But if he does leave for the (NFL) draft, I can step in and go from there.”

And go in two directions for Will Wade’s sake. **TR**

Nick Savage  
Photo by: Ole Miss Athletics



# LSU Football Takes A Savage Approach To Strength & Conditioning

And Nick Savage Better Know His Hot Yoga, Too

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It has not always been the case, but it has been funny over the years noticing that often college football strength and conditioning coaches are not exactly in good condition. And the same is true for college football head coaches.

That is not the situation presently at LSU with new strength and conditioning coach Nick Savage, who looks like he just got out of a lifting session. And with head coach Lane Kiffin, who regularly does hot yoga and looks significantly younger than his 50 years.

Savage followed Kiffin to LSU after working under him as strength coach at Ole Miss from 2022-25. Before that, he was strength coach at Florida and Mississippi State after graduate assistant and intern spots at Toledo, Ohio State and Bowling Green.

“Nick’s done a great job, going back to Mississippi State, then at Florida, then with us at the last place (Ole Miss), and now here,” Kiffin said as spring practice concluded in April. “He does a great job because he has a really good system. But also the players know how much he cares from the time he invests with them.”

In other words, the players see Savage working out, too.

“Not only a change in mindset and how hard they work, but they feel like he’s in there with them,” Kiffin said. “He’s not telling them to do anything that he’s not doing himself as far as commitment to the program. And he’s been phenomenal. When I met with the players post spring practice, one of the common things they said was how much they’ve taken from coach Savage.”

Kiffin did not have to make a lot of calls on Savage before hiring him after the 2021 season at Ole Miss.

“I’d heard about him before we had him,” he said. “I heard from programs where he was that didn’t have him anymore and how they felt a difference without him. That says a lot.”

Kiffin, meanwhile, has an approach to his daily routine that includes much strength and conditioning. He discovered hot yoga while Ole Miss’ coach and quit drinking at about the same time.

Over the years, Kiffin has tried to get his assistants in better shape. He was recently working out with offensive analyst Tee Martin, a former Tennessee national champion quarterback in 1998 and a former assistant coach with the Baltimore Ravens, Tennessee Volunteers, USC and Kentucky, among others.

Kiffin also worked out with Pete Golding, who was his defensive coordinator at Ole Miss before replacing him as head coach with the Rebels last year. Kiffin hired Golding away from the DC job at Alabama under Nick Saban.

“I would say, like coach Saban had the coaching rehabilitation program, where you go there, get a stamp so you could get a job again, I’d like to think we help guys in coaching get in shape,” Kiffin said.

Kiffin was part of Saban Rehab after his firing from USC in the 2013 season. He resurfaced as Alabama’s offensive coordinator from 2014-16, then got the head coaching job at Florida Atlantic before Ole Miss.

“With my change and nutrition and exercise and everything, I feel like we’ve

had a lot of people jump into that,” Kiffin said. “We motivate them.”

And Kiffin saw the results with his Ole Miss staff.

“I’ve actually had a number of wives over the years thank me,” he said. “Because they’re like, ‘Hey, you’re improving my husband – how he’s in shape and how he thinks and probably how long he’s going to live.’”

So far, so good with Tee Martin.

“He’s our new project,” Kiffin said. “He’s doing good, buying in. It’s kind of fun, especially as coaches come together because they all don’t know each other.”

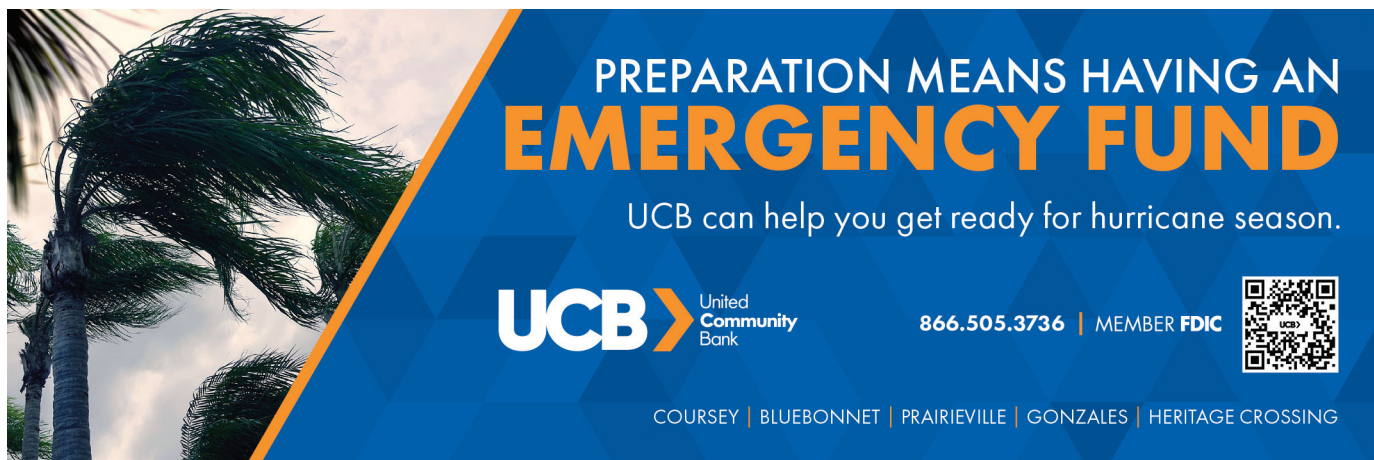
Kiffin put up before-and-after pictures of coaches in Kiffin Rehab.

“Kevin Smith (LSU running backs coach who was at Ole Miss with Kiffin), my own brother (LSU linebackers coach Chris Kiffin, who was at Ole Miss) and George McDonald (LSU receivers coach, who was at Ole Miss),” Kiffin said.

“We’ve put up Pete Golding’s before and after pictures. So, good stories there. It’s actually pretty cool.”

Kiffin likes the impact he and his coaches working out has on his players.

“Obviously, that doesn’t have to be done in order to win,” he said. “But we’re around our players. And when your players see that your mindset is that way about everything as far as the competitiveness, and they’re up here at night doing similar things, too, it just kind of creates a whole culture of coaches and players all in an elite mindset about being great in all areas of their life.” **TR**




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Jay Johnson  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

# The LSU Baseball Season That Came From Outer Space

And Jay Johnson Will Try To Make Damn Sure He's Not On That Trip Again

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

When you consider that LSU just won two national championships in the last three seasons, and the other two seasons of coach Jay Johnson's first four at LSU were within striking distance of Omaha, you start to realize just how strange the 2026 season was.

After going 40-22 and 17-13 in the Southeastern Conference in Johnson's first season in 2022, LSU lost an NCAA Regional, 8-7, at Southern Mississippi to end its season. Had the Tigers won that one, they would have hosted Ole Miss in the Super Regional in Alex Box Stadium, where LSU rarely loses with Omaha on the line.

In 2023, LSU won the national title at 54-17 and 19-10 in the SEC. In 2024, The Tigers dipped to 43-23 and 13-17, but they finished a win away from hosting a Super Regional in Alex Box. But host North Carolina came back to win 4-3 in 10 innings to win that NCAA Regional.

In 2025, LSU won the national championship at 53-15 and 19-11, entered 2026 as a preseason No. 1 and started off 8-0 and 11-1.

Somehow, the Tigers finished their regular season at 29-26 overall and 9-21 in the SEC with the 21 league losses the most in school history. The 1978 team went 12-34 and 6-18. LSU last failed to win 30 in a season in coach Paul Mainieri's first season in 2007 when he finished 29-26-1 and 12-17-1 two years before winning the national championship.

LSU was swept in three consecutive three-game SEC series for the first time in school history. LSU was swept

five times in the SEC in all for another school record. The Tigers set the school record for wild pitches with 86 - 17 more than the previous record set in 1999 and tied in 2018.

LSU pitchers finished the regular season with the most walks in the SEC at 281 - just 11 off the school record of 292 set in 1988 - and the worst ERA in the league at 5.69, which was not far from the school record worst of 6.08 in 1981.

The Tigers did not reach the NCAA postseason for the first time since 2011.

"I've never been through anything like this," Johnson said as the regular season final weekend approached. He went to Omaha twice while coaching Arizona and reached or contended for the NCAA Regional round the other years.

"That was like no other Senior Day I've ever had," he said after a 15-11 loss to Florida in the finale for the Tigers' sixth straight loss. "Because we always had postseason implications factoring into every decision that you make, and today they were not."

No, this was the season from outer space at LSU.

"This is like Pluto," he said, putting the 2026 season into perfect perspective.

And Pluto lost its status as a planet in 2006 as it is now referred to as a dwarf planet. LSU's 2026 season is that, compared to its illustrious solar system of eight national championships since 1991 and 22 trips to Omaha since 1986.

This season has really been a shock to Johnson's system ever since a 7-2 loss at Lafayette on March 4 amid eight pitchers and three errors.

After a 10-4 loss to Texas A&M at home on April 17 following a sweep the previous weekend at Ole Miss, Johnson started reevaluating everything.

"Yeah, I think it's a deep-rooted thing," he said. "We're off, and it will never happen again."

Then he turned to his roster construction with 14 SEC games still to play. But he knew what he saw, and LSU won only three more league games - all against South Carolina, which finished 15th in the SEC at 7-23. He pointed directly at several disappointing players from the portal.

"I made some mistakes in constructing the team in trying to replace guys who were irreplaceable," Johnson said. "We should've looked to replacing them through guys already in the program with players who were athletic and could play defense and be more complete players. OK, we won't make that mistake again. The power moving forward will come from players who start their careers here and develop it."

LSU began to hit better as the season ended because of freshmen playing more like Omar Serna Jr. (.306, 9 HRs, 37 RBIs) and Mason Braun (.305, 3 HRs, 19 RBIs). But the pitching just kept getting worse.

"Maybe, the fact that we scored in two of the three games is a positive," Johnson said after getting swept by Florida, 11-8, 11-1 and 15-11. "We just got to get better on the mound. I've always used, 'If we get to seven on offense.' That's usually produced wins like 80-plus percent of the time. We've screwed that stat up completely this year."

*(continued next page)*



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LSU's offense has scored seven or more runs a whopping 11 times this season and still lost by scores of 13-10, 13-12, 10-7, 8-7, 10-8, 9-8, 13-8, 11-8, 13-8, 11-8 and 15-11 with nine of those in SEC games.

That's poor pitching.

"We've got a lot of work to do," Johnson said.

Johnson started talking about recruiting for next season with more than a month left in the season.

"It's a turnover year for us," he said in late April. "We're going to have six or seven drafted off this team. Maybe eight."

Johnson dispatched assistant coach Josh Simpson on an early recruiting trip in late April.

"We needed to cover some ground," Johnson said.

High ground like on the mound as none of Johnson's freshman pitchers did very well all season.

Help is on the way among LSU's 24 commitments for the class of 2026, such as highly ranked left-hander Logan Schmidt, and right-handers Jensen Hirschhorn and Kolby Stringer. Among the elite players already signed look for right-handers Cooper Sides and Dylan Blomker to possibly contribute significantly along with left-hander Lucas Nawrocki.

Among the committed position players expected to make a mark is outfielder Malachi Washington. Among the top signees are outfielder Anthony Murphy and first baseman Dominic Santarelli.

But pitching is the priority much like after pitching let LSU down in that NCAA Regional at Southern Mississippi. After that game, Johnson said nearly the exact

same thing he said after the loss to Florida on the last day of this season above.

"It's a simple game really," Johnson said in Hattiesburg on June 6, 2022, after that 8-7 loss to USM as six relievers allowed four runs on seven hits in six innings. "They're infinitely better on the mound than us. We have work to do. We've got to pitch better. End of story."

He had as big a job ahead of him then after his first LSU season as he does now.

"This is deep pain," he said four years ago. "I didn't want to let myself think that we're not playing this weekend. I want to win the national championship. That's why I came to LSU - to make a bunch of runs at winning the national title. We'll get there." **TR**



## URGENT CARE OR ER? A SUMMER SURVIVAL GUIDE

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Summer in Louisiana means days by the pool, vacations, sports camps, backyard barbecues, and plenty of time outdoors. Unfortunately, it also brings an increase in injuries, dehydration, burns, bites, and unexpected illnesses.

When something happens, many families are left wondering: *Should I go to urgent care or the emergency room?*

### When Urgent Care is the Right Choice

Urgent care clinics are designed to treat non-life-threatening illnesses and injuries that still need prompt medical attention. During the summer months, some of the most common reasons patients visit urgent care include:

#### Heat Exhaustion & Dehydration

Louisiana heat can quickly become dangerous. Dizziness, nausea, headaches, muscle cramps, and fatigue may indicate heat exhaustion or dehydration.

#### Minor Burns & Sun Poisoning

Too much sun can lead to painful burns, blistering, or dehydration. Urgent care providers can assess burns and recommend treatment.

#### Sprains, Strains, & Minor Fractures

Summer activities often lead to slips, falls, and sports injuries. Urgent care can evaluate injuries on-site and provide X-rays when needed.

#### Cuts Requiring Stitches

From minor boating accidents to kitchen mishaps at summer cookouts, cuts and lacerations are common this time of year. Urgent care can treat many wounds and help reduce the risk of infection.

#### Insect Bites, Stings, & Rashes

Mosquitoes, wasps, poison ivy, and other summer irritants can cause reactions ranging from mild discomfort to significant swelling and irritation.

### Common Summer Illnesses

Stomach viruses, ear infections, sore throats, and respiratory illnesses don't take vacations. Urgent care offers a convenient option, especially when your primary care provider is unavailable.

### When You Should Go to the Emergency Room

Some situations require emergency medical attention and should never be delayed. Go directly to the ER or call 911 if you experience any of the following:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Signs of stroke
- Severe head injuries
- Heavy bleeding that will not stop
- Broken bones with visible deformity
- Loss of consciousness
- Seizures
- Serious burns
- Severe allergic reactions
- Sudden severe abdominal pain

If a condition appears life-threatening or rapidly worsening, the emergency room is always the safest choice.

### Why Choosing the Right Level of Care Matters

Understanding the difference between urgent care and the ER can help patients receive care faster, avoid unnecessary ER wait times, reduce healthcare costs, and keep emergency rooms available for critical emergencies. For many everyday summer illnesses and injuries, urgent care provides a fast, convenient solution that helps families get back to enjoying their summer.

Knowing where to go before an illness or injury happens can make all the difference during the busy summer months. Choosing the right level of care helps patients receive treatment quickly and get back to summer.

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# Who's On Third?

Without Brad Wilson, There Would Have Been No Walk-Off Warren Morris

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU designated hitter Brad Wilson (left) raises his right arm toward the fans at Rosenblatt Stadium on June 8, 1996. If Wilson doesn't get on ahead of Warren Morris' walk-off home run that day, history would have changed. Photo by: NCAA

*“Who’s on first?” is perhaps the most famous question ever asked about baseball.*

It comes from the “Who’s On First” skit from minstrel, word-play sketches 125 years ago, but made famous by Abbott and Costello comedy routines in the 1930s. Recordings of it are in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, and in the Library of Congress.

For fans of college baseball history, and in particular, LSU baseball history, a question as pertinent is:

“Who was on base when Warren Morris hit the most famous home run in college baseball history and one of the most famous in all of baseball history?”

That happened on June 8, 1996, when Morris hit a two-out, two-run, walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth to give LSU a 9-8 victory over Miami for the national championship in the College World Series at Rosenblatt Stadium in Omaha, Nebraska.

With no one on, that home run would have just tied the game, 8-8. And had that runner on third base not reached on a double to lead off and instead was an out, Morris would never have batted. And LSU would have lost 8-7 on an RBI single by Miami shortstop Alex Cora in the top of the ninth.

But designated hitter Brad Wilson, a senior from Pittsburgh, led off the LSU ninth with a screaming line drive off All-American reliever Robbie Morrison’s first pitch down the left field line. He went for two, but as he rounded first, he saw left fielder Eddie Rivero had just thrown to second. He did not consider going back.

“No, I was committed,” Wilson said after the team was honored on May 2 at Alex Box during a 30-year reunion of the 1996 national championship. “If it’s down the line, you’ve got a double.”

The throw beat Wilson to the bag, but his slide avoided the tag.

“Brad did a backdoor slide and threw his hand in the air,” LSU coach Skip Bertman said years later. “I still thought the ump would call him out because the throw beat him. But he called him safe. It’s just crazy how it all unfolded. If he doesn’t lead off by getting on base, Warren never comes up to the plate. And if the ump calls him out at second, we don’t win.”

In 1997, when Bertman saw Wilson before a game at Alex Box, he was still wondering about the play.

“He was showing the 1997 team the play, and Skip did ask why I didn’t do the usual head-first slide,” Wilson said. “I said the throw was going to beat me, and I had to figure something else out.”

And Bertman smiled because Wilson had taken his coaching by showing expert HWA – How to Win Awareness.

“Thank God for an ump being in the right position to see the play accurately,” Wilson said. “I’ve looked at that video a bunch of times. It was close, but I was safe.”

Bertman had also given Wilson a vote of confidence just before he led off the ninth. And Wilson, who was 0-for-4 at the time and 1-for-16 in World Series, needed it.

“You got this. Get on base,” Bertman told him.

“If Brad doesn’t get that hit, nobody knows who I am,” Morris said. “We had a lot of great players team who just knew how to win and knew how to play the game because of Skip.”

Wilson reached third because Justin Bowles hit behind the runner, grounding out to first for the first out. When Tim Lanier - batting .416 in the CWS with a grand slam and six RBIs – struck out, Morris was next.

“Pick me up,” Lanier told Morris.

And that focused Morris on his team. Never mind that his wrist had just started feeling better after hamate bone surgery that sidelined him for several weeks until NCAA Regional play. And he had no home runs that season.

The left-handed Morris also went for Morrison’s first pitch and nailed it toward right field.

“That’s going to be off the wall,” Wilson said to himself. “We’ll tie it. But it just kept going and going.”

And it was gone.

“Then it was all just pictures,” Wilson said. “I really don’t remember what happened after that. The adrenaline was absolutely flowing. Still hard to believe. Still so exciting, watching it again with everyone.”

Bertman, 87, talked about that Wilson slide again and how close the play was.

“I still have people say I was out at second,” Wilson said. “And I just show them my ring and say, ‘Nope, I was safe.’ We just knew we could win no matter what.”

That’s Brad Wilson.

He was on third. **TR**



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Beth Torina  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# Remember When **Beth Torina** Was Supposed To Get Fired?

LSU Recovered from 0-5 Start In SEC To Reach Super Regional

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Regardless of whether the LSU softball team reached the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City or not in 2026, coach Beth Torina's team finished strong and overachieved.

And that after rumors she was on the hot seat entering the season as the Tigers last reached the WCWS in 2017. But it didn't help that she started the season off 7-4 with a 5-1 loss to No. 12 Central Florida and an 8-0 setback to No. 6 UCLA a day later in a game in which LSU got all of three hits.

Both of those were in the Shriners Children's Clearwater Classic in Clearwater, Florida, where the Tiger were 1-4.

The Tigers rebounded with 10 straight wins heading into Southeastern Conference play, however. So, there was a method to Torina's difficult scheduling. Three of those four losses at Clearwater were to ranked teams, including No. 22 Duke.

As soon as LSU hit the SEC, Torina doubters came out again as the Tigers were swept at Tennessee, 5-0 on four hits, 11-6 and 8-5. Tennessee was No. 1 in the nation at the time, though. Two more losses followed to No. 20 Texas A&M at home, and Torina was a pedestrian 17-9 overall and 0-5 in the SEC.

From there, though, the Tigers went 23-8 overall and 13-6 in the SEC to get to 40-17 (13-11 SEC) on their way to face No. 1 Alabama in Tuscaloosa in the Super Regional round.

LSU rolled through its NCAA Regional at home as the No. 16 overall seed, blitzing Akron, 8-0, then No. 14 Virginia Tech, 8-0, and 7-2 for Torina's ninth regional championship

since becoming LSU's coach before the 2012 season.

LSU advanced to the Super Regional round for the second time in three years with Torina coaching for her fifth World Series appearance.

Not bad for LSU's second choice to be coach after Yvette Girouard retired following the 2011 season. Alabama coach Patrick Murphy had accepted the job in June of 2011, but three days later, he changed his mind and returned to Alabama, where he had been since 1999. He won his lone national championship in 2012 before a runner-up finish in 2014 and 13 WCWS appearances.

LSU then turned to Torina, who had taken Florida International to the 2010 NCAA Regional. And she led the Tigers to the World Series in her first season in 2012 and three more times in 2015, '16 and '17 and on the cusp again in '26.

"I don't even know where to start on our team," Torina said after reaching the Super. "I'm so proud of this entire group. I'm proud of their growth and the senior leadership. Every time our senior class decides that it's time to go, those are the ones that go the best. This senior class has been incredible this weekend."

Senior Paytn Monticello, pitching her last game at Tiger Park, held Virginia Tech (48-12) to one earned run on five hits with two strikeouts and zero walks for a complete-game victory to go to 9-3 on the season. And LSU beat up Virginia Tech ace Bree Carrico (15-2) to the tune of eight hits and four earned runs with no strikeouts.

LSU's seniors took over in their final home act. Trailing 2-0 after two innings, the Tigers took a 4-2 lead in the third with a solo home run by senior Jalia Lassiter, a two-run single by senior Maci Bergeron and an RBI double by Ally Hutchins. Lassiter finished 2-for-5 with two RBIs. Bergeron was 2-for-4 with two RBIs and Alix Franklin went 3-for-4.

The Tigers extended their lead to 6-2 in the fifth on an RBI single by Lassiter and an RBI fielder's choice grounder by Sierra Daniel. LSU scored an unearned run in the sixth for the 7-2 lead.

"There are so many cool stories in here – the day that Alix Franklin had, the weekend Maci Bergeron had," Torina said. "Jalia always has a good weekend. Paytn Monticelli's story – it makes me feel super emotional to think about what she just did out there and the journey that took her to LSU. Avery Hodge isn't up here, but our senior class was incredible in making this happen."

Torina couldn't stop talking about her team.

"It was a total team effort," she said. "We executed the plan beautifully. We knew the plan was not going to be won in one moment, but by death by a thousand cuts. We did exactly that, pressure throughout the whole weekend. I couldn't be prouder of this team, and I'm excited for what's in front of us."

Suddenly, Torina's future looks bright again at LSU. **TR**

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Will Wade  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# Will Wade Was The Tortoise In The Transfer Portal Race

But He Finished Fast Amid Harsh Criticism

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

I was worried about the last paragraph in my story in the May Tiger Rag Magazine on LSU basketball coach Will Wade's early struggles in the portal just after he took over for the second time last March 30.

The story detailed various players Wade targeted and didn't get - No. 2 point guard PJ Haggerty, who left Kansas State for Texas A&M over LSU. And others - No. 6 Seton Hall center Najai Hines, who picked Connecticut over Wade, Georgia's No. 5 combination guard Jeremiah Wilkinson, who picked Arkansas over LSU, No. 4 Georgetown small forward KJ Lewis, who went to USC, Wade's own No. 5 guard at North Carolina State, Matt Able, who went to North Carolina, and No. 15 Florida Atlantic guard Deven Vanterpool, who opted for Providence.

The last paragraph read, "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."

Well, that issue came and went, and still Wade's roster didn't have enough to scrimmage three-on-three by late May. As of May 18, he had only five commitments and/or signees on his roster after retaining no one from the team he inherited. And there were a few good players on that team that could help, such as point guard Dedan Thomas Jr. (now at Houston), forward Jalen Reed (now at Michigan) and point guard Jalen Reece (now at Texas A&M). And the other disturbing part is, Wade appeared to be scraping the bottom of the barrel early on.

His fifth commitment, for example, on May 18, was not even ranked by 247sports.com. That was journeyman guard Austin Nunez (6-foot-2, 185 pounds) of Texas-San Antonio, which went 5-25 overall and 1-17 in the

American Athletic Conference in 2025-26. But hey, at least Nunez is a body, and Wade needs those.

Nunez, who will be a fifth-year senior for LSU, did average 9.8 points and 2.8 assists in 21 starts last season. And he was a four-star prospect from Wagner High in San Antonio as the No. 71 player in the country, No. 14 point guard and No. 7 player in Texas when he signed with Arizona State. A reserve as a freshman in 2022-23, he averaged 4.5 points and started twice.

After a transfer to Ole Miss for 2023-24, little changed. And Nunez averaged 6.6 minutes a game. He switched back to Arizona State for 2024-25, but missed most of the season injured before a transfer to UTSA, where he played 28.5 minutes a game last season. But he shot poorly - 30 percent (70 of 230) and 25 percent from three-point range (22 of 87).

Before the addition of Nunez was factored in, which wasn't expected to be much of a factor, Wade's portal class was ranked No. 40 by 247sports.com and No. 72 by On3.com. Even former coach Matt McMahon, who doesn't have Wade's personality we keep hearing, finished with the No. 16 portal class last year with seven transfers by early May.

Three other Wade additions are ranked - No. 9 small forward Mouhammad Dioubate of Kentucky, No. 23 shooting guard Abdi Bashir of Kansas State and No. 45 point guard Divine Ugochukwa of Michigan State. And there is center Marcio Santos from a European professional team in Tel Aviv, Israel.

And if Wade gets forward Allen Graves, that would be a major coup and make up for a lot of loss. And I'd gladly give him the last laugh. Graves (6-9, 225) of Ponchatoula High averaged 11.8 points and 6.5 rebounds

with 33 blocks at Santa Clara last season as a redshirt freshman. He is the No. 4 player in the portal and No. 2 power forward. That's a franchise.

But on May 19 - the day before Tiger Rag went to press - Wade went wild.

First, he signed the best player of his 2026 Class in former Big East Player of the Year (2025-26) at St. John's in forward RJ Luis (6-7, 215), who averaged 18.2 points and 7.2 rebounds that season. But there is baggage. Undrafted in 2025, he signed with Utah before being traded to Boston and signed there, which means he will have to clear legal battles before ever playing at LSU. But Wade thought he was worth the risk.

Then Wade gained a commitment from small forward Saliou Niang (6-6, 190) of the Virtus Bologna pro team in Italy. Niang, 22, was the 28th pick of the second round of the 2025 NBA Draft by Cleveland.

Wade also added two other European pro players - center Brice Dessert (7-0, 247) of Andalous Efes, 22, in Turkey and 26-year-old point guard Hyam Mardar (6-3, 181) of Hapoel In Tel Aviv, Israel.

So, now the Tortoise has nine players on his roster, if he gets them all eligible.

But meanwhile, the college basketball world went on a turtle shoot.

Michigan State legendary coach Tom Izzo came out against Wade trying to get RJ Luis, according to Jon Rothstein of CBS Sports.

"He is one of the most useless basketball minds in the sport," Rothstein said Izzo told him.

And national basketball analyst Jeff Goodman said Wade's style of recruiting is making college basketball "a mockery." **TR**



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# Jada Williams Gives LSU New Point Guard In Portal Reload

By TIGER RAG NEWS SERVICES

One of Kim Mulkey's latest portal additions gives LSU women's basketball something it badly needed: a proven point guard.

Jada Williams, a transfer from Iowa State, arrives at LSU after averaging 15.3 points and 7.7 assists per game last season. She was one of the top playmakers in the country and gives the Tigers a natural lead guard after the departure of Jada Richard.

Williams is not LSU's only portal addition, but she may be the one who ties the rest of the roster together. Mulkey also added Florida transfer Laila Reyn-

olds, Tennessee Tech transfer Chloe Larry and Spanish forward Noa Morro, reshaping the roster around both experience and depth.

Reynolds gives LSU another experienced guard with scoring ability. Larry brings additional backcourt production after averaging double figures at Tennessee Tech. Morro, a 6-foot-3 forward from Spain, adds size and versatility to the frontcourt.

The Tigers also still have major pieces returning, including Mikaylah Williams, MiLaysia Fulwiley, Grace Knox, ZaKiyah Johnson and Kate Koval. That

gives LSU a roster with star power, young talent and now a veteran point guard capable of organizing it.

That is why Jada Williams matters so much. LSU did not simply add another scorer. It added a player who can handle the ball, create for others and stabilize the offense.

Mulkey's best teams have had talent, but they have also had clear roles. With Williams coming in, LSU has a chance to define those roles early.

The portal gave LSU more names. Jada Williams gives the Tigers a direction. **TR**



# LSU Women's And Men's Golf Teams Enjoyed Consistent Success

Each Squad Reached NCAA Postseason

By TIGER RAG NEWS SERVICES

The LSU women's golf team advanced to the NCAA Championships for a school record sixth straight year after a 1-over par 841 in the NCAA Regional round in Waco, Texas, sending the Tigers to Carlsbad, California, for a shot at the title with 15 other teams in late May.

"Six straight years," LSU coach Garrett Runion said. "I'm very proud of that. To have a consistent program like that, to extend our record streak, to be around at the end for so many years in a row shows the consistency and high level of performance this team has had for years."

The No. 34 Tigers were led by senior Taylor Riley at 1-under par 69, while Francesca Fiorellini rolled in a long birdie putt on the 18th hole to finish at an even 70. Ryleigh Knaub shot a 1-over 71, and Josefin Widal hit a 2-over 72.

"We play a tough schedule throughout the year," Runion said. "We don't shy away from teams and try to prepare ourselves for situations like this. They rose to the occasion and very proud we're advancing."

The No. 8-ranked men's team was trying to join the women in Carlsbad for the NCAA

Championships from May 29 through June 3 while playing in the NCAA Regional round in Marana, Arizona.

The Tigers have made the NCAA Regional field every year since 2008. LSU was ranked as high as No. 2 in the nation during the season. The Tigers landed in the top five in nine of their tournaments this season, including three No. 1 finishes.

Four Tigers have held a below 70-stroke average mark in Jay Mendell (69.56), Noah McWilliams (69.60), and Árni Sveinsson (69.83). **TR**



# LSU Women's Tennis Finishes Strong In NCAA Quarterfinals

## LSU Men Season Ended At Home Regional

By TIGER RAG NEWS SERVICES

The No. 10 seed LSU women's tennis team started fast, but couldn't rally against No. 2 seed Auburn and fell 4-1 at the NCAA quarterfinals in Athens, Georgia, ending a successful season.

LSU finished 22-10 and left coach Taylor Fogleman proud.

"Obviously, it's a tough pill to swallow today, especially whenever it's the end of your season," Fogleman said. "I think it's a bit of a shame to play this match in the quarterfinals, because the quality of tennis could have been a round or two later. But that's sometimes the way the draw works out."

Fogleman loved his team's effort.

"We really took it to them in the initial part of singles," he said. "But their kids

battled hard just like ours. And we came up a couple of points short."

### Singles

1. #9 Cadence Brace (LSU) def. #16 DJ Bennett, 6-3, 7-5
2. #21 Kayla Cross (LSU) fell to #31 E. Khairutdinova, 6-7 (4-7), 4-6
3. #77 Ella McDonald (LSU) fell to #55 Angella Okutoyi, 6-1, 4-6, 4-6
4. #96 Addison Lanton (LSU) vs. #58 Ashton Bowers, 6-3, 5-7, 4-1, unfinished
5. Carolina Kuhl (LSU) vs. #68 Ava Esposito, 7-5, 6-7 (3-7), 2-2, unfinished
6. Kinna Graham (LSU) fell to Eva Ionescu, 6-4, 0-6, 5-7

### Doubles

1. #40 Cadence Brace/Kayla Cross (LSU) def. #2 Ava Esposito/DJ Bennett, 6-4
2. #17 Kenna Erickson/Ella McDonald (LSU) fell to #8 Angella Okutoyi/Merna Refaat, 4-6
3. Carolina Kuhl/Addison Lanton (LSU) fell to E. Khairutdinova/Ashton Bowers, 3-6

The LSU men's team (26-7) finished the season with a 4-3 loss to Pepperdine in the NCAA Regional Final at LSU.

"It is tough to process it right now," LSU coach Danny Bryan said. "But it was an amazing season." **TR**

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**Todd Horne**  
Vice President / Executive Editor

LSU President William “Wade” Rouse said a lot at the Baton Rouge Press Club. But only one sentence changed the entire trajectory of the arena fight:

“The taxes are being collected.”

With that admission, LSU’s arena saga stopped being a hypothetical and became something far more concrete — and far more consequential. This is no longer a debate about whether Baton Rouge needs a new arena, or whether “no taxation without representation” is a slogan or a constitutional principle. It is no longer a procedural quarrel over how the Metro Council handled a vote last summer.

This is now a story about public money — real dollars, already flowing into an LSU-controlled account — and a university that has not yet explained what it intends to do with them.

Rouse confirmed the architecture: an LSU Economic Development District, an Athletic Subdistrict layered on top of it, two separate taxes, an account, and revenue accumulating inside it. None of it has been spent.

That is not a detail. That is the entire ballgame.

Because once a public institution begins collecting revenue through a taxing district — especially one drawn to exclude voters — the burden shifts. The question is no longer whether LSU can do this. The question is whether LSU can justify what it is doing right now.

And that question has a blunt edge:

Where is the money going?

Rouse tried to draw a distinction. He said he would not call these “arena taxes.” He emphasized that the EDD is broad, that it can fund infrastructure, that LSU has potholes and broken concrete to fix. All true.

## The Arena Question LSU Can’t Dodge Anymore

But then he said the quiet part out loud: where the money is spent “kind of depends on if we end up getting an arena or not.”

That is not a distinction. That is an admission.

LSU cannot keep insisting these are not arena taxes while simultaneously acknowledging that the fate of the arena determines how the money is used — especially when the lawsuit challenging the district cites internal LSU communications claiming the arena project gets “both cents” of the new taxes.

If LSU has a clean explanation, it should offer one. If the district is lawful, broad, and defensible, LSU should say so. If the money will be used only for legitimate public purposes, LSU should prove it. If the arena can be financed without compromising academics, LSU should show the math.

So far, the clearest thing Rouse has said is that the arena will not be free.

“The idea that it was going to not cost anything, I don’t think is true,” he said.

That matters because the public has heard this pitch before: private developer, public benefit, minimal risk, modern facility, economic impact, everyone wins. Sometimes that pitch is honest. Sometimes it is optimistic. And sometimes the cost is simply buried where the public doesn’t know to look.

This is why Tennessee’s model is so instructive. The University of Tennessee is building its Neyland Stadium entertainment district through a straightforward arrangement: private development on university land, with rent and revenue sharing. No voterless tax district. No boundary engineering. No hidden public exposure.

LSU’s model is the opposite: a university-controlled taxing district, an Athletic Subdistrict, Metro Council-approved taxes, public land, a private arena developer, potential future public funding sources, and a lawsuit alleging that voters were deliberately carved out of the map.

That does not make LSU wrong. But it does make LSU accountable.

The lawsuit filed by Darrell Glasper Sr. and argued publicly by attorney William Most is not an anti-arena crusade. It is a challenge to the method: if LSU is collecting taxes from businesses and customers around campus to support a privately developed arena, the people paying those taxes should have had a vote.

That is not anti-arena. It is anti-end-run.

To Rouse’s credit, he did not sound like someone trying to ram through a deal. He sounded like a president who inherited a complicated project and is still trying to determine whether the numbers add up. He said LSU does not want to raid academic funds. He said LSU is still searching for financing partners. He said key details remain unresolved.

Good. Then resolve them in daylight.

How much has been collected?

Are both tax layers active?

Which businesses are paying?

Who controls the account?

Is the money segregated?

Has any of it been pledged?

Will any of it be rebated to the developer?

If the arena dies, where does the money go?

If it lives, how much public money is on the hook?

These are not hostile questions. They are the bare minimum.

LSU wants to be treated like a major public institution. It wants the trust, the benefit of the doubt, the civic deference that comes with being the state’s flagship university. Fair enough. But trust is not a blank check. Trust requires transparency.

The arena may be a good idea. Baton Rouge may need a modern venue. LSU may benefit from a more dynamic campus district. Students may gain from better facilities. All of that can be true.

But the financing matters.

The structure matters.

The vote matters.

And now that the money is being collected, the accountability matters most of all.

The public money is real.

The account is real.

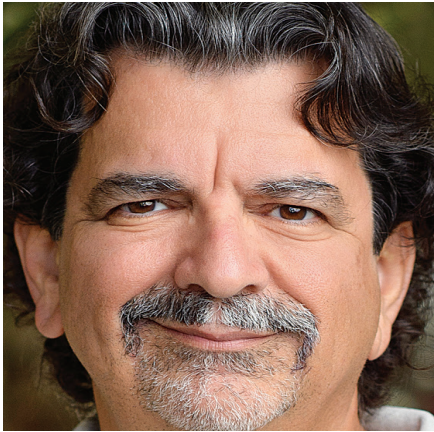
The lawsuit is real.

And LSU no longer gets to answer the arena question later. It has to answer it now.

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**Jim Kleinpeter**  
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

Graduation Day has come and gone. School is out. And for college athletes across the country, that means a quick trip home and then a return for the summer program.

Meanwhile, LSU basketball coach Will Wade was finally getting close to having enough players for a five-on-five practice - not counting coaches - as he got to nine players on his roster in late May. He will be having some eligibility issues, though, particularly concerning recent addition RJ Luis, a former NBA player.

Clearly, though, Wade's first LSU team his second time around on campus in 2026-27 will have a distinct other worldly feel.

"This year I'm going to lean a little heavier on the international route," Wade said on Jon Rothstein's Inside College Basketball Now podcast. "This will be the last year some of those guys will be eligible. So, we're going to lean a little heavier on the international route. Those kids have a lot of experience. There are just some natural things that they've learned over there that really help college basketball and can translate to us in college basketball.

"We're going to certainly get some of the best guys we can from the transfer portal. We've gotten a couple and we're going to try to get a couple more, but we're going to supplement that with some overseas guys."

At this point, the portal may be a little too picked over. With Kentucky forward Mo

## LSU Basketball Coach Will Wade Trying To Be The "Overseas King" To Lane Kiffin's "Portal King"

Dioubate, Kansas State shooting guard Abdi Bashri and Michigan State transfer point guard Divine Ugochukwu, all transfers, has at least gotten a head start.

Don't worry, there are plenty of players represented by plenty of agents to get Wade connected with European players who come in sometimes with some pro experience and often are older than many American players.

Most likely this is a stop gap measure and not a bad one, especially if it opens up a corridor for future players to supplement a roster built on USA recruits.

Marcio Santos, a 6-9 perimeter player, is an intriguing addition. A Brazilian who played in a European pro league, he's a strong 3-point shooter who can catch and shoot but brings liabilities in rebounding and defense. He's a good fit for the up tempo style of today's college basketball.

And, Wade out recruited Kentucky for Santos. The Wildcats liked him enough to send an assistant coach to Israel, where Santos played last season.

This international approach can work, as Illinois showed with its five players from the Balkan countries. The Illini made the Final Four with that core group, which should open some doors for Wade and his staff of recruiters. He certainly can offer playing time.

It kind of reminds me of legendary LSU coach Dale Brown, who was one of the first to chase international players back in the 1980s. The American game has grown exponentially overseas, producing players with strong fundamentals.

LSU fans won't care about spelling or pronouncing names as long as Wade makes LSU relevant again. It's been four long years since the Tigers made the NCAA Tournament and the school has been too

*"There are just some natural things that they've learned over there that can translate to us in college basketball."*

- Will Wade

successful in the past to let it continue. The early returns are good as the ticket office got 600 requests for season tickets shortly after Wade was hired.

Wade is going to get a pass from fans for a couple of years. Blending a cast of players who have never worked together is the hardest job a coach has. Season One only has to offer a ray of hope for the future.

His hire still emits a strange vibe as he prepares for his second go around, from disgraced NCAA rules violator during his tenure from 2017-22 to his return as "savior." It's not only that LSU wiped its memory clean of his ethical flexibility, but that Wade would want to return. There was a time when a North Carolina State coach wouldn't entertain the thought of leaving basketball country for football country, and he torched a few bridges on the way.

Wade and Lane Kiffin have some commonalities. In addition to making LSU the fashionable school for opponents to hate, both have spent the offseason in player acquisition mode, and LSU fans really don't care where they come from, even if it's from parts unknown.

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



**Jim Engster**  
President, Tiger Rag Magazine

There was a time in college football when one loss spelled doom for any power vying for a national championship. Most of the winners were undefeated for generations, and LSU remains the lone titlist to finish at the top with two defeats. The Tigers were 12-2 in 2007 in year three of the Les Miles experiment, dropping contests in triple overtime to Kentucky and Arkansas. The defiant squad captured the SEC crown and a series of last game defeats by other contenders sent the Tigers to the Superdome. There, Miles and crew beat Ohio State 38-24 in a second title run in four years. LSU posted undefeated records in 1908, 1958 and 2019 and is regarded as the best in the land in those years. No. 1 status was achieved in 2003 and in 2007 with less than perfect seasons. Nick Saban withstood a 19-7 loss to Florida at home in 2003, but his team roared down the stretch for the first of his seven national titles. Only two of Saban's teams finished unbeaten. Alabama went 14-0 in 2009 and 13-0 in the Covid season of 2020.

In the playoff era, Indiana may reign as the last undefeated champ for a while. Just as the 32-0 Hoosiers of 1976 are the most recent perfect record team in NCAA basketball, the IU footballers of 2025 became the first major college juggernaut to go 16-0, eclipsing the 15-0 mark of the Burrow Bengals of 2019. More games and longer seasons produce ample opportunity for hiccups on the path to glory.

Lane Kiffin lifts the curtain on his Louisiana opus with the most ambitious LSU football slate of opponents since the murderer's row Charles McClendon faced in his final season of 1979. It is curious that McClendon's hope of retaining his job spurred his unit to play magnificently in close defeats to No. 1 Alabama (3-0), No. 2 USC (17-12) and No. 6 Florida State (24-19).

The losses to the Tide, Trojans and Seminoles were epic battles at Tiger Stadium in a span of six weeks. The three marquee foes

## Playoffs or Bust for Lane Kiffin

completed the season with 34 wins, one loss and one tie.

The affable Arkansan was just one score short against Alabama from winning the SEC and depriving Bear Bryant of his last title. It would have been difficult for Athletic Director Paul Dietzel to dump Mac with that scenario.

LSU featured a veteran roster with John Ed Bradley, Steve Ensminger, David Woodley, Carlos Carson, Hokie Gajan, Tom Tully, Greg LaFleur, John Adams, Chris Williams, Willie Teal, Marcus Quinn, George Atiyeh, Benjy Thibodeaux and Lyman White coupled with freshman standouts Albert Richardson, Greg Bowser, Ramsey Dardar and Alan Risher.

Talented indeed. But USC was waiting in game three with the most gifted roster in college history with four Pro Football Hall of Famers and two Heisman Trophy recipients in Charles White and Marcus Allen. Southern Cal was a professional operation and almost succumbed to a team that reflected the traditional college outfit of the latter part of the Twentieth Century.

Mac was dispatched to retirement at 56 despite the heroic effort of 1979. Thirty-four-year-old Bo Rein left North Carolina State to replace McClendon and was dead six weeks later in a plane crash. His successor at Raleigh was Monte Kiffin, father of then five-year Lane Monte Kiffin.

McClendon had tough luck with his best teams in his tenure. His 1969 Tigers lost only once, 26-23 at Jackson to Ole Miss and Archie Manning. The Rebels erased a late 23-12 lead by LSU and cost the Tigers a shot at playing for the national title against Texas in the Cotton Bowl.

LSU won the SEC title in 1970, but the Tigers lost their national quest on opening night when Texas A&M scored with 13 seconds remaining on a 79-yard pass from Lex James to Hugh McElroy. It was the first touchdown in Aggie history by a black player. The 20-18 win came only eleven days after LSU quarterback Butch Duhe died of a brain hemorrhage.

A year later, LSU was stunned at home in the 1971 opener, 31-21 by Colorado. The Tigers were loaded with Bert Jones, Tommy Casanova, Andy Hamilton and Art Cantrelle, but they never recovered from the shocker against the Buffaloes.

Governor John McKeithen was so incensed over LSU's opening night woes that he punched out a window in a state car in

frustration. The year's opener is also fraught with danger at Death Valley.

Kiffin's initial assignment is against Clemson and two-time NCAA champion Dabo Swinney. The Tigers from South Carolina have fallen back to the pack in recent seasons and lost at home to LSU to start the 2025 season. Yet Clemson remains a legitimate opponent. Kiffin's honeymoon will last exactly one week if Swinney scores an upset victory on Sept. 5.

After the liftoff against Clemson, LSU has other home dates with Texas A&M, Alabama and Texas sprinkled with road tests at Ole Miss, Auburn and Tennessee. Those seven games will determine whether Kiffin is a hit or a work in progress in his debut campaign. He likely will need to win five of those clashes to make the playoffs.

It is anticipated the Tigers to prevail often enough to make the round of 12 contestants for NCAA gold. Kiffin nonetheless encounters an array of minefields at the start of his odyssey in Baton Rouge. We will witness how the hot yoga coach handles the vast pressure coming with championship expectations.

### Bill Cassidy is no Butch Cassidy

Great political campaigns are like well-orchestrated robberies with lots of strategy, precision, timing amid uncertainty. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, immortalized in the 1969 film starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, performed the longest string of successful train and bank robberies in history.

U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy was facing daunting odds in his quest for a third term after voting to convict President Trump on articles of impeachment. He lost his bid in humiliating fashion despite a massive war chest and an array of well compensated advisors telling him he could beat Julia Letlow and John Fleming. Politicians like bank robbers often hear what they want, not what they need.

The loss by Cassidy means that LSU will not be represented in the U.S. Senate for the first time in nearly 80 years. Cassidy, brother of former Tiger great Steve Cassidy, finished third in the May 16 Republican primary, sending the gastroenterologist back to Baton Rouge.

Letlow went to South Florida and U.L. Monroe while Fleming is an Ole Miss man. The other Louisiana Senator is John Kennedy who attended Louisiana Tech, Vanderbilt and Virginia, not LSU.

Previous LSU Senators include Russell Long (1948-87), Bennett Johnston (1972-97), John Breaux (1987-05) and Mary Landrieu (1997-15).

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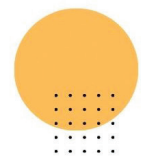
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