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**ON THE COVER -  
2025-26 In Review:**

**LSU experiences seismic change in a sports year like no other.**



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Photo by: Jonathan Mailhes



**Glenn Guilbeau**  
*Tiger Rag Editor*

When the 2025-26 sports calendar year began last August, there were legitimate hopes of LSU's first appearance in the College Football Playoff since 2019 and maybe more.

Coach Brian Kelly faced a do-or-die year in his fourth season, because he had not scratched the playoffs despite a \$100 million, 10-year contract that demanded such. And the collective NIL powers that be spent \$20 million for the roster, truly entering the portal game for the first time. And the result was the No.1 transfer class in the country.

Kelly also returned senior quarterback Garrett Nussmeier, who likely could have been a second or third round pick in the 2025 NFL Draft, if not higher. He finished fifth nationally in passing with 4,052 yards and 29 touchdowns for 10th in 2024.

And defensive coordinator Blake Baker entered his second season after marked improvement in '24 with some impressive talent.

But it was all over before it started, because unknown to most of the public and the media, Nussmeier tore an oblique muscle in his abdomen in August, which rendered him a shell of who he was in '24 for all of 2025.

It was learned only last April that a cyst developed on Nussmeier's spine last August that caused the persistent oblique pain that damaged his arm strength and accuracy. He changed his mechanics to try to ease the pain and messed his skills up more.

And from Nussmeier's core injury, everything eventually fell apart to the core of the LSU program. Kelly was fired the day after he was eliminated from the playoffs with his

## LSU's Year In Review: Let's Go To Hell And Hurry Back, Shall We?

third loss of four SEC games to fall to 5-3 overall, 2-3 in the SEC.

And Hell was only beginning.

Little did anyone know when LSU opened the 2025-26 sports calendar year that its Big 3 – Football, Men's Basketball and Baseball – would harken back to the simpler time of 1965-66 when NIL meant nil, as in nothing. And "the portal" was more associated with the NASA space program.

Bear Bryant only had two national championships at Alabama by 1965. Nick Saban was only 13 as a freshman at Monongah High in West Virginia. And Skip Bertman, 27, was Miami Beach High School's baseball coach.

But LSU didn't go Back To The Future. It went Back To The Worst.

In the 1965-66 sports year at LSU, the Big 3 Sports went 9-29 in the SEC for a .236 winning percentage – 3-3 in football under coach Charles McClendon, 2-14 in men's basketball under Frank Truitt and 4-12 in baseball under Jim Smith.

The 2025-26 LSU Trilogy was almost as bad and worse than every other year in the SEC after 1965-66. The Tigers went 15-41 in football, men's basketball and baseball in the SEC last season for a .268 winning percentage.

-Football went 3-5 with Kelly getting fired after the 2-3 league start.

-Men's basketball went 3-15 under coach Matt McMahon, who was fired after the season.

-And, yes, Hell even found two-time national champion baseball coach Jay Johnson, who fell to 9-21 in the SEC for the fewest LSU wins in the league ever in a season.

More hellish is this, though. LSU's Big 3 teams were 1-30 against the SEC teams that finished with winning SEC records last year.

The football team was 0-5, while baseball was an uncanny 0-15. Only McMahon mustered a win over an SEC winning team in the league – 78-70 at Missouri for a 1-10 finish.

New football coach Lane Kiffin and new basketball coach Will Wade can literally go nowhere but up. And considering how Johnson's new roster is looking for 2027, he will likely make damn sure he never sees how the other half lives again.

Thank goodness for coach Kim Mulkey, who got women's basketball to the Sweet 16 and finished 29-6 and 12-4, including 6-6 against ranked teams.

LSU's Big 3? They were 4-25 against ranked teams for 13 percent. The football team was 1-5, the men's basketball team 0-4 and baseball was a whopping 3-16.

It was truly the year of Hell at LSU.

But call it a cleansing burn. It wasn't a strategic controlled burn as one sees professionals do in the forest to clear underbrush and improve ecosystem health. But it could achieve the same goal. Football and men's basketball each had deep underbrush issues and badly needed rejuvenation of their entire ecosystem.

Enter new football coach Lane Kiffin, who has systematically instilled life into LSU quicker than any football coach in LSU history. Now, he just has to win.

And new men's basketball coach Will Wade is trying to do that, just as soon as he gets his new roster through customs. Then he can try to succeed in the international language – by winning.

Baseball coach Jay Johnson remains, but you can bet he'll be control burning Alex Box down until he cleanses 2026 out of his system.

And he won't be alone.

Onward to 2026-27, and the Rebirth.

---

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).



# Some Continue To Misread LSU’s Newfound Major Financial Commitment To Football

By Glenn Guilbeau, Tiger Rag Editor

On3.com has been OffKey.com when it comes to reacting to the huge financial commitment LSU athletic financial powers have made for success in football. New coach Lane Kiffin’s seven-year contract is for \$90 million. Cost of his roster, which features the No. 1 portal class in the nation with 41 players, is between \$30-\$40 million.

So, for some reason, multiple writers at On3.com have overreacted and say that kind of money is a national championship mandate for Kiffin in 2026. The “national championship or bust” mentality.

On June 19, @On3 tweeted, “LSU didn’t invest \$50 million for patience. It invested for national championships” above a story about Kiffin, who promised a national championship in an interview, but he made it clear he didn’t know when.

Not exactly an accurate tweet. Kiffin is under no pressure to win a national championship this season or to even make the playoffs.

The \$20 million paid for coach Brian Kelly’s No. 1 roster of 18 mostly upperclassmen – that was a desperate playoffs-

or-bust payment, because he was average through three seasons.

Kiffin is honeymooning, and his roster is as much about 2027 and ’28 as ’26. He basically signed two portal classes full of underclassmen. LSU has put up the money for its long-term future. This year will be fun, but it doesn’t matter if LSU reaches postseason in Kiffin’s first year.

“LSU will finish 9-3 or 10-2,” tweeted @LSUFANSDOTCOM.

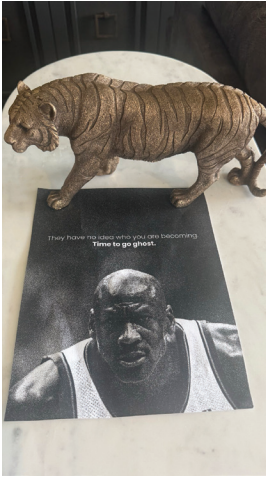
Thank you for the refreshing realism.





**Lane Kiffin**  
@Lane\_Kiffin

5/11/26



**In The Bayou With Tyrann Mathieu**  
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Lane Kiffin makes a National Championship promise for LSU

"I don't know how fast it's going to happen, but we're going to win a national championship. We're going to have the teams and the rosters back to the way they were playing when they were great."



**Glenn Guilbeau**  
@SportBeatTweet

Breaking ,, Add USC freshman right-hander Diego Velasquez to LSU portal commitment list.



**ESPN**  
@espn

Nick Saban appeared in Congress to support the bipartisan Protect College Sports Act, which aims to "bring order to a system that badly needs fixing" in the NIL and transfer portal era.



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# Big Four, Big Legacy

Flau'jae Johnson Arrived As A Star, Stayed As A Standard And Left Lsu As One Of The Defining Players Of Kim Mulkey's Era.

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Executive Editor

Flau'jae Johnson didn't slip quietly into Baton Rouge. She stormed through the revolving doors of the Pete Maravich Assembly Center like a chart-topping single set to shake the rafters. When Kim Mulkey signed

Johnson out of Georgia, she wasn't merely adding another guard. She was announcing that LSU, under Mulkey, intended to matter nationally again. A four-star McDonald's All-American with a famous name, a rapper's

cadence in her jump shot and a personality loud enough to fill an arena before the first buzzer, Johnson arrived as part statement, part promise — and she delivered on both.

From the moment she laced up her sneakers as a freshman in 2022-23, Johnson stamped her imprint on the program. Inserted into a roster rebuilt by Mulkey's championship vision, she slid seamlessly into the starting lineup of a team that roared its way to LSU's first-ever women's national title. In that whirlwind season, Johnson averaged double figures, bullied the glass from the guard spot and defended with an intensity that set the tone for her teammates. When confetti rained down in Dallas, Johnson stood at center court among giants of the game. But that was only the opening scene.

In an era when college stars routinely chase greener pastures through the transfer portal or leap for professional paydays — and now, thanks to NIL, can monetize their likeness with one hand while crossing half court with the other — Johnson bucked the trend. She had all the trappings of a modern sports entrepreneur: endorsement deals, a budding rap career and a social media footprint that outpaced many professional athletes. But instead of treating LSU as a steppingstone, she extended her stay. That decision may yet prove her most enduring act of leadership.

Over four seasons, Johnson evolved from that electric freshman spark into one of women's college basketball's signature faces. She started every season opener, finished as a multiple-time All-SEC selection, earned All-American recognition, crossed the 2,000-point threshold and, in 2026, became a first-round WNBA draft pick. Yet through every milestone,

she kept her competitive edge razor sharp. She never lost the fire that first flickered in Baton Rouge, the same fire that compelled opponents to circle her name on the scouting report.

To grasp the nature of her legacy at LSU, you have to understand her role as the bridge between eras. Seimone Augustus set the standard for excellence, Sylvia Fowles brought power and legitimacy, and Angel Reese turned the program into a cultural earthquake in 2023. But when the lights dimmed and the spotlight threatened to shift elsewhere, Johnson stayed on stage. She carried forward that title-winning momentum and helped transform Mulkey's LSU from a championship breakthrough into a sustained national brand. Under her watch, every home game felt like a marquee event, every opponent treated the Tigers as a measuring stick, and LSU women's basketball no longer felt like a revival. It felt like a force.

Off the court, Johnson was equally transformative. She arrived at a pivotal moment, when the NIL revolution and the women's basketball television boom were converging to redefine what it meant to be a college athlete. Johnson didn't simply collect sponsorships. She built a brand. She dropped singles, turned fashion, music and social media into part of her public profile, collaborated with influencers and used her platform to uplift others. Never once did the business of being Flau'jae eclipse the business of basketball. Rather, the two amplified one another. She became living proof that today's student-athlete can be a scorer,

a style icon and an entrepreneur without sacrificing any one role.

That duality — the ability to dominate on the floor while commanding headlines off it — set her up for her next chapter with the Seattle Storm. Taken eighth overall by Golden State in the 2026 WNBA Draft and immediately traded to Seattle, Johnson has already carved out meaningful minutes as a rookie guard. Early box-score flashes — rebounds from the perimeter, physical on-ball defense, fearless drives to the rim — remind LSU faithful why they fell in love with her game. Yes, the WNBA represents a steeper climb: longer defenders, tighter passing lanes, relentless scouting. But she has been shaped by scrutiny. At LSU, she thrived under the brightest lights and toughest questions. Mulkey's creed — hardness before comfort — became her playbook.

When generations of LSU fans look back, they'll see No. 4 etched into program lore for the points she scored and the championship she helped secure. They'll admire the tape of her blocks, the reels of her three-pointers and the flash of her on-court charisma. But the truest measure of Flau'jae Johnson's impact runs deeper. She is the player who changed the way everyone thought about LSU women's basketball — not as an echo of past glories, but as a program built for the present and future. She didn't just arrive at LSU with fanfare. She stayed long enough to transform noise into legacy. She didn't just play for LSU. She helped LSU become the force it is today. **TR**



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## 7/10

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**MALCOLM SCOTT**



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TO FORMER LSU GYMNAST

**CHASE BROCK**



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Sam Burns  
Photo by: US Open



## LSU's Sam Burns Has Come Close In 2 Majors This Year, But Don't Be "Expecting" Him At British Open This Month

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

It could have been the ultimate Father's Day gift for Shreveport's Todd Burns from his son Sam.

Sam Burns, the first team All-American LSU golfer in 2017 out of Calvary Baptist Academy, charged back against faltering leader Wyndham Clark at the U.S. Open

on June 21 after entering the U.S. final round at even par and seven strokes behind Clark.

Burns, 29, birdied three of his first eight holes at Shinnecock Hills in Southampton, New York, to pass 2026 PGA Tour money leader and close friend Scottie Scheffler for second place.

Clark, meanwhile, was authoring potentially the largest collapse in U.S. Open history as he bogeyed three of his first seven holes.

Burns fired a 3-under par 67 in his last round to finish 3 under for the tournament at 277. Clark won it despite a 3-over 73 over the final 18 as his 276 beat Burns, who had finished a few holes previously. And Clark became the first U.S. Open winner to lead after each of the four rounds since Martin Kaymer in 2014.

But had Burns made a 16-foot birdie putt on 18, he conceivably could have tied him for the lead and forced a playoff. But he missed the putt by that much – about a half inch.

A Burns' win would have been his first major victory and marked the biggest U.S. Open comeback since Arnold Palmer came from seven behind leader Mike Souchak to win in 1960 at Cherry Hills in Colorado.

"I really thought I made that putt," Burns said after tossing his putter and hitting his knees. "It just didn't go in. It's unfortunate I just came up one short."

What a Father's Day gift it could have been for dad, who was at the tournament.

"He just said he was really proud," Burns, who lives in Choudrant near Ruston, said. "I think we both knew how special it could have been for Father's Day. But I know he's proud."

As well he should be. It was Burns' best finish in a major in his career. He just finished seventh at the Masters in April after leading the first round. Burns also sat at No. 10 on the 2026 PGA Tour earnings list after the U.S. Open at \$5,962,539.

Burns played with his 2-year-old son Bear while waiting for Clark to finish. His wife Caroline was also there and expects to have their second child in a few weeks. So, he was not scheduled to play in the British Open July 16-19 at Royal Birkdale in England.

"It's a crazy life we live sometimes," Burns said. "As a competitor, you want to go out there and compete as hard as you can and try to win. But at the end of the day, when you're off the golf course, family is a lot more important."

Burns shot a 78 on the last day of last year's U.S. Open at Oakmont near Pittsburgh to finish seventh after leading following two rounds.

"I felt more like I lost that tournament," Burns said. "I certainly don't feel that way today. I did everything I could to have a chance to win."

Except for that last putt.

"I'll see that putt tonight," he said.

And likely for more nights.

But Burns showed what he can do despite the odds, which could lead to that first major win.

"To start the day seven shots back, I knew it was going to take something really special," he said. "I couldn't have asked for a better start."

A better finish will happen. **TR**



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Nick Saban, Ted Cruz.  
Photo by: Alabama Public Radio



# SEC And Big Ten Take A Hit As Protect College Sports Act Moves Onward

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

The college sports world's ticket to dramatic change – the bipartisan Protect College Sports Act bill – passed the Senate Commerce Committee in late June and appeared on the fast track to becoming the first bill related to college sports ever brought to the Senate or House floor.

The bill won by a touchdown and a field goal vote – 19-9 – in committee.

Clearing the Senate Commerce Committee was just the first step of an arduous process expected to last through July and August. The bill needs more than 60 votes

in the Republican-controlled chamber by a 53-47 count and will need to clear the House as well.

But this was still progress.

“We are proving that we are resilient in keeping this moving,” said Senator Maria

Cantwell (Democrat-Washington), who co-authored the momentum-building bill with Senator Ted Cruz (Republican-Texas) in May.

And it was former LSU and Alabama coach Nick Saban's stirring and persuasive backing of it before Congress on June 3 that may have gotten the ball rolling on the bill designed to regulate soaring payments to athletes and limit the ridiculous, unlimited automatic transfers, among other things.

Cruz called it "the last, best hope we have to save college sports," and promised they would get the necessary votes to make it law.

"Thank you Chairman Cruz, I could use a little of that Cuban coffee," Saban started in his testimony to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and proceeded to be the ultimate eye opener.

"I didn't sleep much last night because of this testimony," he said.

But he was off.

"I really want everybody to know I'm not here to represent a conference or a team, but to preserve college athletics as a whole," said Saban, who played defensive back at Kent State from 1970-72 and was an assistant coach or head coach from 1973-2023. "I think we all have to ask ourselves a question. What is our guiding principle for the future of college athletics, including Olympic, women and non-revenue sports?"

Unlike so many who discuss what should happen to college athletics, particularly the lawyers, Saban spoke from experience.

"I have spent my adult life in college athletics. I believe in it," he said. "I have seen players come into a program who need structure, need discipline, need coaching, need academic support, need accountability, and I have seen them leave with a degree, a career, a family, and a better chance to be successful in life. I think the current system of what we have in college athletics right now makes it more difficult to do these things. We moved away from development to focusing on money and not life skills."

And he illustrated how it is out of control.

"To put this in perspective, if you had the biggest, baddest Ferrari that you could ever have, and it was going 150

mph toward the Grand Canyon, somebody needs to tap the brakes," he said.

The bill is trying to do exactly that, whether the most powerful conferences – the SEC and the Big Ten – like it or not. And they don't.

SEC commissioner Greg Sankey and Big Ten commissioner Tony Petitti particularly do not like how the bill pools the wealth of media rights of which the SEC and Big Ten get the lions' share. But they haven't been able to get the changes they want and likely will not.

"We continue to believe revisions are needed to secure our support for the bill," the SEC and Big Ten said in a joint statement after they lost the vote.

Too bad.

"What we did today was say we're not going to let the most powerful, richest conferences dictate to the rest of America what's going to happen to 500,000 athletes," Cantwell said. "They fear a more level playing field." **TR**

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Jay Johnson. Photo by: Arizona Athletics

# LSU Set To Hire The Pac-12 Baseball Coach Of The Year - Jay Johnson

*(Reprinted from June 2021, Tiger Rag Magazine)*

By RON HIGGINS

LSU usually does not go west when it hires head coaches, but it apparently is now.

Jay Johnson, the Pacific-12 Conference Baseball Coach of the Year in 2021, will

be LSU's new baseball coach, Glenn Guilbeau of USA TODAY Louisiana first reported on Thursday (June 24), according to an LSU source directly involved with the search. Kendall Rogers of D1 Baseball confirmed it later Thursday.

Johnson, 44, a native of Oroville, California, just finished his sixth season with the Wildcats on Monday when his Pac-12 champions (45-18, 21-9) were swept out of the College World Series by Stanford and Vanderbilt. Johnson's team beat visiting Ole

Miss and fellow LSU candidate Mike Bianco, two games to one, the previous weekend in the NCAA Super Regional round.

Johnson was 208-114 at Arizona with three NCAA tournament appearances including College World Series trips this season and in his first year in 2016 when the Wildcats lost to Coastal Carolina in the CWS championship series.

Prior to Arizona, Johnson coached two seasons at Nevada, where he had a 72-42 record. His 2015 Nevada team went 41-15 and won the Mountain West Conference championship.

Johnson's first head coaching job was at Point Loma Nazarene in San Diego in 2005 after playing shortstop for the NAIA school in 1999 and 2000 and then becoming an assistant from 2001 to 2004.

Johnson moved on to become an assistant for the University of San Diego for eight seasons before Nevada hired him as head coach.

His salary at Arizona was \$856,687, and he is expected to make \$1.2 million in his first year at LSU.

Johnson has the reputation of being an offensive-minded coach.

Arizona was fourth in the nation in batting average (.325) this season, first in hits (737), first in runs (537), first in doubles (145), first in triples (30) and sixth in scoring (8.5 runs per game),

"Our goal is to get three quality at-bats in a row as many times as we can throughout the game," Johnson said. "When we do that four times throughout a game, we're really, really tough to beat. There's probably going to be eight or nine runs up on the board."

In a podcast last spring, Johnson described his recruiting philosophy.

"We want to put together the most complete team as possible to win any type of game against any type of team at any type of park on any type of day," he said. "Starters have to be able to throw three pitches for strikes. You need really good bullpen options that are different, so it never allows a team to settle in with one look. Offensively, you need three really good left-handed hitters that can be a threat at any time. Obviously, everybody knows the importance of catching, shortstop and center field."

Arizona's last recruiting class was ranked No. 4 in the nation by Baseball America and

Collegiate Baseball and No. 1 of all teams west of the Mississippi River.

Third baseman Mikey Romero, one of Arizona's current top commitments, announced on Thursday on Twitter, just after the news broke on Johnson's move to LSU, that he decommitted from Arizona and committed to LSU.

It is not known how many of Johnson's Arizona assistants will join him in Baton Rouge. But one who isn't is pitch-

ing coach Nate Yeskie, who will join the new staff at Texas A&M, which just hired Jim Schlossnagle as head coach from Texas Tech.

**EDITOR'S NOTES:** *Mikey Romero never played for LSU. He went right to pro ball after being selected in the first round of the 2023 MLB Draft. ... Jim Schlossnagle only accepted the Texas A&M job after he didn't get the LSU job. ... Pitching coach Nate Yeskie left A&M for LSU after the 2023 season and remains with the Tigers.* **TR**

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THE SITDOWN

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Photo by: LSU Athletics.  
Inset Photo by: NOLA.com



New Orleans Columnist

# Jeff Duncan

**Discusses New LSU-Themed Book - "Tigerland" -  
About The Changing World Of College Athletics**

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

**L**SU really is just different, as LSU football coach Lane Kiffin so eloquently said at his introductory press conference on Dec. 1 in Tiger Stadium, starting a hashtag for the ages – or at least for his first season.

The Harper Collins publishing giant based in London and New York City believes so. And it has signed NOLA.com/Baton Rouge Advocate columnist Jeff Duncan to write a book largely about LSU called “Tigerland” due out before the 2027 football season. He will tell the story of the massive changes happening in college athletics through the lens of LSU.

Duncan previously published “From Bags To Riches” about Hurricane Katrina and the Saints’ Super Bowl win in the 2009 season, “A Life Impossible” in 2024 on former Saint Steve Gleason’s battle with ALS, and “Payton And Brees” in 2020 about Saints’ coach Sean Payton and quarterback Drew Brees dominating the NFL. He was also part of Pulitzer Prize winning teams at the Times Picayune for Katrina coverage.

**TIGER RAG:** What led to the “Tigerland” book idea?

**JEFF DUNCAN:** This is a dynamic time in college athletics, really an unprecedented transformative period. And LSU is probably at the epicenter of this transformation. What we’ve seen happen in the last six months at LSU – the turnover in the athletic department, the all-in approach that the University is taking – is fascinating.

And it’s one of the more compelling stories that I’ve come across in my 30 years of covering sports in Louisiana.

With the characters involved – Lane Kiffin, Will Wade now in the mix, the fact that Verge Ausberry is the athletic director – there are just so many fascinating threads in this story. What LSU is doing in many ways is at the forefront of this changing landscape of college athletics. And Harper Collins reached out to me and

basically said, “Hey, we think there’s a great story in Louisiana and at LSU.” I’m very honored and very excited about the opportunity to tell that story. It’s going to be fascinating. I’m going to basically follow the athletic programs for the next athletic season and write about - through the prism of LSU - this changing landscape of college athletics.

**TIGER RAG:** What is it about LSU that makes it the *(continued next page)*

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# THE SITDOWN

Photo by: LSU Athletics.



epicenter or the microcosm of this transformational change?

**JEFF DUNCAN:** Pretty clearly LSU is throwing a lot of money at its athletic program. The impetus behind the changes with the football and men's basketball programs were to increase revenue. LSU is seen as a Fortune 500 company in this state. Governor Jeff Landry sees that. We all know that a big part of his agenda in his tenure so far has been bringing business to the state. He knows LSU athletics is good for business in Louisiana. And it needs to

be successful. And they understand that it is a business now. Verge Ausberry will tell you it's no longer the days of – and these were great ADs in their time – Joe Dean and Skip Bertman. Former coaches and the like moving into the athletic director chair. That's a bygone era.

Today, it's all about revenue generation. And LSU is the most compelling storyline there. But they're not alone. My alma mater, Louisville, has come out and said they're losing money, and they're still pouring money into their athletic department, because they see this as

a game of musical chairs, like a lot of schools. And they want to have a seat at the table at the end. And to do that, you've got to be successful. So, you've got to invest now and let the chips fall where they may. And obviously, LSU is making a big bet – a nine-figure bet on their athletic programs. The governor is involved in that bet as well. And it's going to be fascinating to see if the gamble pays off. I think everyone in the nation is going to be following LSU athletics from these storylines.

PRESENTED BY



**TIGER RAG:** Do you see colleges beginning to operate more like professional teams or private franchises inside a public infrastructure?

**JEFF DUNCAN:** That's definitely where college sports are going. We're already seeing in some universities a restructuring of the athletic departments into basically professional sports models. I had former LSU athletic director Scott Woodward recently tell me he could one day see a similar setup where athletic departments are separate entities as some of these hospitals associated with universities are. We're already seeing that. If you look at South Florida right now. Their new athletic director (Rob Higgins, whose title is CEO of Athletics) used to be the head of the Tampa Sports Commission. He doesn't have an athletic or academic background at a university. But he knows how to run a sports business, and everyone in their front office (pro team term) is being hired from similar backgrounds. South Florida is going to be run very similar to an NFL franchise. Threading the needle to make that work with the responsibilities that universities have is the magic formula. How do you solve that riddle? I think everyone right now is trying to figure it out.

A lot of this would be solved if everyone would just adhere to the rules. But everybody's looking for an edge in athletics, and they find the edge wherever they can find it regardless of the rules. The NCAA was at one time in charge of college sports. And it has been taken off the rails, and it's unregulated right now. There's no one to be the heavy. There's no Roger Goodell (NFL commissioner) to hold everyone in line. And everyone is just running rampant. The NCAA was trying to regulate it for decades. Once they saw where this was going, they threw up their hands and said, "Hey, we're being sued into oblivion. You guys have at it." And this is where we're at now. I'm not sure if college leaders can solve it, and that's why Congress is involved with the Protect College Sports Act.

**TIGER RAG:** Where are you on the move to increase the number of teams in the College Football Playoff from 12 to 16 or to 24?

**JEFF DUNCAN:** I do not agree with going to 24 teams. I'm willing to listen to the arguments for it. But I definitely think that going to 16 teams is a perfect compromise between where they're at now and some of the other proposals. I started out in Monroe (News Star newspaper) covering Division I-AA football at Northeast Louisiana (now Louisiana-Monroe), Grambling and (then-I-AA Louisiana Tech). They've had a 16-team playoff for decades, and it's worked just fine. All the lower levels have had that. They've managed to do it.

The driver of all this as we all know is money. And it's going to provide more revenue for these universities like LSU and others in the SEC that are desperately going to need it, if we continue to go this way in college sports. It's the Indy 500 with no guardrails. And I don't know where it's going to stop, but right now finding more revenue is the only solution. Expanding the playoff would provide more revenue. **TR**

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Photo by: LSU Athletics.



**Brian Kelly** was fired.

**Scott Woodward** was toppled.

**Wade Rouse** assumed control.

**Verge Ausberry** took command.


**Lane Kiffin** arrived at the nation's loudest stage.

**Will Wade** returned from exile.

In one season, LSU did not merely change coaches,  
**It changed the power structure.**

# THE YEAR LSU CHANGED EVERYTHING

By **Todd Horne**, Tiger Rag Executive Editor  
**Glenn Guilbeau** contributed to this story.



**There are years that fit neatly inside a record book. LSU's 2025-26 year did not. It belonged in a war room, a board room, a governor's office, a donor's text thread and, finally, back on the fields and courts where the consequences of all that power were supposed to show up as wins and losses.**

The games mattered. They always do at LSU. But this was not a year defined only by final scores. It was the year the machinery behind those scores came out from behind the curtain. The football coach with the nine-figure contract was fired. The athletic director who wrote the contract was removed days later. A new university president arrived from McNeese with immediate authority over an institution in public upheaval. LSU separated its president and chancellor roles for the first time since 2012. Verge Ausberry, long one of the most influential men in the athletic department, moved from the background to the front of the room. Lane Kiffin became LSU's football coach after the most watched coaching chase in the country. Will Wade, once fired in scandal, returned as men's basketball coach with the same blunt force that made him both combustible and impossible to ignore.

LSU did not experience a normal transition. It experienced a regime change. And the most important story of the year is not any single firing, hiring, press conference or buyout. It is the combined force of all of them. The old LSU collapsed in public. A new LSU, more expensive, more political, more professionalized and more desperate to win immediately, began taking shape in real time.

The 2025-26 season should be remembered as the year LSU stopped pretending its athletic department was merely a department. It behaved like what it has become: a billion-dollar public sports enterprise, run through public offices, private influence, political pressure, donor urgency, media scrutiny and an unforgiving fan base that has no patience for explanations when football falls behind.



TIGERS

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**“LSU did not experience a normal transition. It experienced a regime change.”**

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# THE FIRST DOMINO: BRIAN KELLY RUNS OUT OF ROAD

Brian Kelly's LSU tenure did not end slowly. It ended with the violence of a snapped cable. Less than 24 hours after a 49-25 loss to No. 3 Texas A&M in Tiger Stadium, LSU fired the winningest active coach in college football. Kelly had arrived from Notre Dame with a 10-year, \$100 million contract and the polished confidence of a coach hired to professionalize LSU football. Four seasons later, he left with a 34-14 record, a 19-10 SEC mark, one SEC West title, no College Football Playoff appearances and the largest buyout LSU had ever faced.

The firing itself was not the surprise. The timing, scale and financial consequence were. Kelly's contract called for roughly \$54 million if LSU fired him without cause in 2025. LSU's public language suggested the separation terms were still being worked out, but the contract was the contract. The money was not a rumor. It was the price of LSU's impatience and Scott Woodward's wager.

Kelly's LSU years will always be difficult to summarize because he was neither a disaster nor a success. He stabilized a program that had cratered after the 2019 national championship. He won the SEC West in his first season. He recruited. He spoke the language of process, alignment and development. But LSU does not pay for process. LSU pays for Saturdays. By the time Texas A&M walked into Tiger Stadium and left with a 24-point win, patience was gone.

The problem was not merely that Kelly lost. It was that LSU had stopped believing in the direction of the program. His teams too often looked incomplete. The defense lagged behind. The edge was missing. The fan base saw a coach with a Notre Dame resume but not enough LSU voltage. At LSU, that distinction matters. The job requires organization, but it also requires combustion. Kelly brought structure. He never fully brought belief.

That is why the Texas A&M loss became more than one bad night. It became a referendum. LSU had entered the year with national expectations and a No. 9 preseason ranking. By the end, the program was 7-5, 3-5 in the SEC and staring at the possibility that the new revenue-sharing era would bury any program too slow to act. Kelly did not get fired only because of what happened in 2025. He got fired because LSU looked at the future and decided it did not trust him to lead it there.

His final message to the players was brief: love you, finish the season. Then he was gone. That was the human ending. The institutional ending came next, and it was louder.

LSU

**“Kelly was hired to make LSU more orderly. Kiffin was hired to make LSU dangerous again.”**

THE

**“Woodward had fired Kelly.  
Then Woodward was fired  
for hiring Kelly.”**

# THE SECOND DOMINO: SCOTT WOODWARD GETS THE BLADE

If Kelly's firing shook LSU football, Scott Woodward's removal shook the entire university power structure. Athletic directors at LSU are not middle managers. They are power brokers, fundraisers, political operators, brand stewards and, in football, the people who either solve the central problem in Louisiana or become the problem themselves.

Woodward had arrived in 2019 like a conquering son of Baton Rouge power. He replaced Joe Alleva, who was pushed out not long before Ed Orgeron, Alleva's hire, delivered the 2019 national championship. Woodward then built an extraordinary non-football resume at LSU. He hired Kim Mulkey, and LSU won the 2023 women's basketball national championship. He hired Jay Johnson, and LSU baseball won national titles in 2023 and 2025. He promoted Jay Clark, and gymnastics won the 2024 national championship. On paper, few athletic directors in America could match that trophy case.

But football is not one line on the LSU balance sheet. Football is the balance sheet. Woodward's signature football hire was Brian Kelly, and the Kelly contract became the instrument of Woodward's undoing. When LSU fired Kelly and the \$54 million buyout came into view, Gov. Jeff Landry did not speak like a spectator. He spoke like someone determined to seize the process. Landry said Woodward would not pick the next coach. He even joked that he would let Donald Trump pick the coach before Woodward. The line was outrageous, memorable and devastating. Once the governor said it publicly, Woodward's authority was effectively gone.

LSU's Board of Supervisors finished the job. Woodward was out days after firing Kelly, a coup following a coup. He had ruled with the aura of a man who could hire national championship coaches across the athletic department. But his football miss was too expensive and too visible to survive. The irony was pure LSU. Woodward had fired Kelly. Then Woodward was fired for hiring Kelly.

His departure exposed what had been true all along. LSU athletics is not insulated from Louisiana politics. It never has been. The difference this year was the lack of disguise. The governor's voice entered the coaching search. The board acted quickly. The athletic director was removed. Verge Ausberry was elevated. LSU's internal hierarchy changed in less than a week.

Woodward leaves a complicated legacy. He made LSU richer in championships. He also left LSU with one of the most expensive football corrections in the sport's history. That contradiction is not a footnote. It is the story. In modern college athletics, excellence in every sport cannot save an athletic director if football becomes a financial and political liability.

# A NEW PRESIDENT A SPLIT CHANCELLORSHIP AND A SEARCH UNDER FIRE

While LSU athletics was coming apart, the university itself was undergoing its own power shift. The Board of Supervisors named Wade Rouse, the president of McNeese State, as LSU system president and picked University of Alabama Provost Jim Dalton as chancellor and executive vice president. The decision separated the system presidency from the main campus chancellorship for the first time since the roles were merged in 2012.

That structural change mattered. LSU was not just hiring two administrators. It was creating a new division of labor at a moment when athletics, academics, politics and public trust were all colliding. Rouse said he and Dalton had agreed in principle that Rouse would handle athletics, external affairs and government relations, while Dalton would oversee academics and research. In plain English, Rouse would sit closest to the heat.

Rouse arrived with support from powerful figures but skepticism from faculty. His background was nontraditional for LSU's top job. He had been president of McNeese only since 2024, after holding other administrative roles there since 2019. He was not the conventional research-university president rising through a long academic ladder. He argued that his experience was an asset. Critics wondered whether he had the scholarly profile and institutional depth required for LSU.

Dalton's arrival helped answer part of that concern. As Alabama's provost since 2020, with experience at Michigan, Ohio State and Tennessee, Dalton gave LSU a more traditional academic hand over the flagship campus. Faculty Senate leadership indicated that putting Dalton over academics helped mitigate concerns about Rouse. But the timing was still brutal. LSU had interim officeholders across major positions, including provost, chief financial officer, enrollment management and multiple deans. The university needed stability at exactly the moment its search process had generated arrests, nondisclosure agreements and public criticism.

Seven students were arrested at an Oct. 1 presidential search committee meeting after they were ordered out for exceeding their allotted public comment time. Search committee members were required to sign nondisclosure agreements that restricted discussion of the committee's work. Finalist forums were held over three business days with sparse attendance and little advance notice on campus. For a university already battling suspicion over transparency, the optics were terrible.

Then Rouse inherited the football crisis almost immediately. LSU did not need a ceremonial president. It needed someone who could stand in the middle of athletics, politics, government relations and public confidence without making the confusion worse. That challenge arrived before Rouse had even learned the room.

MT

**“LSU was not just hiring two administrators. It was creating a new division of labor at a moment when athletics, academics, politics and public trust were all colliding.”**

THE

**“When the person leading the search is described as interim one day, acting the next and potentially permanent later, LSU creates its own leverage problem.”**

# THE VERGE AUSBERRY QUESTION

Into that uncertainty stepped Verge Ausberry, one of LSU's most familiar internal power figures and, suddenly, its most important athletic decision-maker. Ausberry had been deputy athletic director since 2019 and had worked inside LSU athletics in various capacities since 1991. He had been involved in major football coaching searches across eras: Nick Saban, Les Miles, Ed Orgeron, Brian Kelly and now Lane Kiffin. He knew the place. He knew the donors. He knew the politics. He knew the sport. Most important, he knew LSU from the inside out.

That should have made his elevation clean. It did not. Rouse's early comments created confusion over whether Ausberry was interim, acting or permanent. Sources indicated Rouse had effectively made him the athletic director. Rouse then told Piper Hutchinson he would remove the interim tag and assess the situation, adding that he could not make a good decision after being on the job for eight hours. Later, he called Ausberry the acting athletic director with full authority to find a football coach.

At most universities, this would be a communications stumble. At LSU, during a football search, it was dangerous. Agents listen for weakness. Coaches listen for uncertainty. Donors listen for alignment. When the person leading the search is described as interim one day, acting the next and potentially permanent later, LSU creates its own leverage problem.

Ausberry deserved clarity because LSU needed clarity. He had a broader resume inside the athletic department than most people outside the building understood: academics, fundraising, corporate relations, marketing, game management, sports administration, life skills, sports medicine and performance, equipment, alumni relations, external relations and government relations. He was not a mascot hire or a caretaker. He was an institutional operator.

There was also legitimate baggage. Rouse said he was not familiar with Ausberry's 2021 suspension tied to LSU's handling of sexual assault accusations after the Husch Blackwell investigation. That admission raised its own questions. Anyone assessing Ausberry for the permanent job needed to know the full record. But knowing the full record is different from pretending Ausberry did not have the experience to run the department. He did.

The larger point was simple: LSU was asking Ausberry to land the biggest football coach on the market while leaving public ambiguity around his title. In the end, he did what LSU needed him to do. He got Lane Kiffin. That result changed the conversation.

A man in a blue suit is speaking at a podium. He is gesturing with his right hand. The background is a blurred indoor setting. The word "THE" is visible in large, gold, block letters in the upper right corner.

THE

**“This was not a rebuild on a budget. It was a declaration that LSU intended to spend like a national title contender immediately.”**

# THE LANE KIFFIN HIRE: LSU CHOOSES COMBUSTION

Lane Kiffin's hiring was the year's biggest athletic move and the clearest statement about what LSU wanted to become. After Kelly, LSU did not hire another corporate stabilizer. It hired voltage. It hired offense. It hired personality. It hired adaptability. It hired the coach Woodward had passed on after the 2021 season.

Kiffin was LSU's original target once Kelly was fired. He was also the most sought-after college football coach available. Florida pursued him. Ole Miss fought to keep him. Kiffin considered staying at Ole Miss, where he had built the Rebels into a College Football Playoff team and delivered the first 11-win regular season in school history. He wanted to coach Ole Miss through the playoff even after accepting LSU, with guardrails to protect both programs. Ole Miss athletic director Keith Carter refused. Kiffin left for Baton Rouge.

The scene captured the modern sport perfectly: two LSU planes, a departing playoff coach, a furious old school, a restless new school, social media tracking flights and statements, and a fan base reading every minute as evidence of either triumph or chaos. Kiffin landed in Baton Rouge around 5 p.m. on Nov. 30 and was introduced the next day. The Lane Train had arrived.

For LSU, the contract told the truth. Kiffin's deal was expected to be about seven years and \$91 million, roughly \$13 million annually, with LSU also planning a massive annual talent procurement package through the transfer portal, recruiting and NIL. This was not a rebuild on a budget. It was a declaration that LSU intended to spend like a national title contender immediately.

Kiffin's resume fit the moment. At Ole Miss, he went 55-19 overall and 32-17 in the SEC from 2020 through 2025. After the COVID year, he went 50-14 over the next five seasons. He had rebuilt himself after USC, modernized Alabama's offense under Nick Saban, won national championships as an assistant and become one of the sport's most creative offensive minds. He also became the first coach in SEC history to lead three current SEC programs: Tennessee, Ole Miss and LSU.

But the fit was not only tactical. It was cultural. LSU is not a quiet job. It is not a place for a coach who wants to disappear into process language. It is loud, emotional, political, theatrical and ravenous. Kiffin understands spectacle without being consumed by it. He understands the portal. He understands quarterbacks. He understands attention. He understands that in the new era, coaches are no longer just coaches. They are roster CEOs, media brands, offensive architects, negotiators and daily crisis managers.

Kelly was hired to make LSU more orderly. Kiffin was hired to make LSU dangerous again. That does not guarantee success. It does clarify the bet. LSU chose the coach most capable of turning chaos into advantage. After a year in which the institution itself seemed to be on fire, that was not accidental. It was the job description.

# WILL WADE RETURNS: THE EXILE COMES HOME

If Kiffin's hire was the football swing, Will Wade's return was the basketball thunderclap. LSU hiring Wade back after firing him in 2022 was one of the strangest and most revealing moves in modern college sports. It was not just a coaching hire. It was a verdict on the old rules, the new marketplace and LSU's tolerance for reputational risk when losing becomes intolerable.

Wade was fired on March 12, 2022, after FBI and NCAA investigations tied him to major Level 1 recruiting violations at LSU. The NCAA later said Wade obstructed its investigation by concealing evidence and lying to investigators. It charged him with unethical conduct, including allegations involving the use of his wife's bank account to funnel money to a recruit. He received a two-year show-cause penalty. McNeese accepted restrictions when it hired him in 2023.

Then Wade won. That is the part that changed everything. He took McNeese, a downtrodden program, to NCAA Tournaments in 2023-24 and 2024-25. He moved to North Carolina State and took the Wolfpack to the NCAA Tournament in his first season. Meanwhile, LSU men's basketball under Matt McMahon collapsed into three losing seasons in four years and a brutal SEC record. The program had become irrelevant in a league that was getting stronger and more expensive.

So LSU did what LSU often does when the stakes get high enough. It made the uncomfortable move and dared everyone else to keep up. Wade returned at 43, not as a rehabilitated unknown, but as a known force with a known past and a known ability to build rosters fast. The decision reunited him with familiar Lake Charles connections: Wade Rouse, the former McNeese president now leading LSU, and Heath Schroyer, the McNeese athletic director who hired Wade and then accepted a senior LSU role.

The Wade move also revealed how radically the sport had changed since his firing. What once existed in the shadows of recruiting now exists, in different form, in the open economy of NIL, revenue sharing and roster budgets. That does not erase the NCAA findings. It does explain why many fans viewed Wade less as a pariah than as a coach punished for operating before the market admitted what it was becoming.

The risk remains real. LSU cannot afford compliance sloppiness. It cannot afford another scandal. It cannot pretend Wade's record is clean. But the calculation was obvious. In the new SEC, losing quietly is not a moral victory. Wade gives LSU basketball immediate relevance, immediate recruiting credibility and immediate edge. Like Kiffin, he is not a safe hire. He is a high-ceiling hire. LSU chose ceiling.

MS

**“In the new SEC, losing quietly is not a moral victory.”**



# THE O



**“The year in review, then, is not a clean celebration. It is a warning with a pulse.”**

# THE COMMON THREAD:

# LSU NO LONGER HAS TIME FOR SLOW FIXES

Put the six moves together and the pattern becomes unmistakable. Kelly was fired because LSU did not believe he could deliver a championship future fast enough. Woodward was fired because his football contract turned patience into a \$54 million liability. Rouse was hired into a structure that put him close to athletics and government relations immediately. Dalton was hired to stabilize academics while Rouse handled the external heat. Ausberry was elevated because LSU needed an internal operator who could move quickly. Kiffin was hired because LSU wanted a coach built for the portal, NIL, offense and attention. Wade was rehired because LSU basketball could no longer afford irrelevance.

This was not a year of patience. It was a year of acceleration.

The new economics of college sports made that acceleration unavoidable. Revenue sharing, NIL, transfer freedom and media money have compressed timelines. Coaches do not get five years to build culture while the roster matures. Athletic directors do not get unlimited goodwill when contracts explode. Presidents cannot treat athletics as a side matter when athletics drives public attention, donor behavior and political pressure. Every decision is faster now because every mistake is more expensive.

LSU's response was messy because LSU is messy. But it was not timid. The university spent. It fired. It hired. It absorbed criticism. It let politics into the open. It accepted reputational risk. It gambled that elite coaches and institutional urgency could restore momentum faster than caution ever could.

That approach can work at LSU because LSU has advantages few programs can match: brand power, recruiting territory, SEC membership, fan obsession, donor passion, national titles across multiple sports and a cultural identity that still sells. But it can also backfire because LSU's greatest strength is also its weakness. The place runs hot. When aligned, that heat creates championships. When mismanaged, it burns through coaches, administrators and public trust.

The year in review, then, is not a clean celebration. It is a warning with a pulse. LSU has put itself back at the center of the national conversation. It has also raised the cost of failure. Kiffin and Wade do not get to be interesting. They have to win. Rouse and Ausberry do not get to be symbolic. They have to govern. Dalton does not get to be a footnote. He has to protect the academic credibility of a flagship university while athletics consumes oxygen.

# FANS GOING FORWARD

## WHAT IT MEANS GOING FORWARD

The next year will tell whether LSU experienced a correction or merely another convulsion. Kiffin will be judged immediately because football at LSU is judged immediately. His first roster, first quarterback decision, first SEC road game and first November loss, if it comes, will be interpreted as evidence. That is unfair only in the way LSU has always been unfair. The job pays too much and matters too much for patience to be the default setting.

Wade will be judged differently but just as intensely. Fans will expect the PMAC to matter again. They will expect portal wins, SEC wins and March relevance. His return gives LSU basketball a jolt it badly needed, but it also reopens every question about oversight. If Wade wins cleanly, LSU will claim it saw the future before others admitted it. If trouble follows, the university will own the decision completely.

Ausberry's future may depend on whether the Kiffin hire becomes what LSU believes it can become. His case for permanence became stronger the moment Kiffin chose Baton Rouge. But running the department is bigger than landing one coach. LSU now sits in a world of revenue sharing, roster budgets, legal uncertainty, facility pressure, media scrutiny and public-records fights. The next athletic director is not just hiring coaches. He is managing a sports corporation inside a public university.

Rousse's challenge is broader. He must prove he is more than the beneficiary of political support and Lake Charles connections. He must win faculty trust, manage athletics without being swallowed by it, and show that LSU's split leadership model can work. Dalton must make the academic side feel seen, protected and serious. If athletics becomes the only visible priority, the new structure will be judged harshly.

And Woodward's shadow will remain. His hires produced championships. His football contract produced a reckoning. That dual legacy will haunt every major LSU decision for years because it captures the modern dilemma perfectly. At the top of college sports, ambition is mandatory. But ambition without accountability becomes a bill someone else has to pay.

That is what made 2025-26 different. LSU was not simply replacing names on doors. It was learning, painfully and publicly, what the new era costs.

RD

# PETE MARAVICH ASSEMBLY CENTER

**“The job pays too much and matters too much for patience to be the default setting.”**

# THE YEAR THE

A wide-angle, high-angle photograph of a football stadium at night. The stadium is packed with spectators, and the field is brightly lit by several large floodlights. The sky is dark, and the overall atmosphere is one of a major sporting event. The text 'THE YEAR THE' is overlaid in large, bold, gold letters at the top of the image.

**“LSU must prove that its appetite for victory can coexist with competence, transparency and institutional discipline.”**

# THE YEAR THE CURTAIN CAME DOWN

Every LSU season comes with noise. This one came with revelation. The curtain dropped. Fans saw the contracts, the politics, the public statements, the rushed clarifications, the boardroom force, the donor-class urgency, the coaching-market theatre and the university's attempt to reorganize itself while the whole state watched.

Some will remember it as the year Brian Kelly failed. Some will remember it as the year Scott Woodward fell. Some will remember it as the year Lane Kiffin arrived. Some will remember it as the year Will Wade came back. But the larger story is how all of those things belonged to the same moment.

LSU changed because the sport changed. The money got bigger. The timelines got shorter. The tolerance for drift disappeared. The old arrangements could not hold. In the span of a few months, LSU replaced a football coach, an athletic director, a university president structure and a basketball philosophy. It moved from Kelly's corporate order to Kiffin's creative chaos, from Woodward's imperial model to Ausberry's internal command, from McMahon's quiet failure to Wade's combustible return, from a merged presidency to a divided leadership model built for pressure.

That is not a transition. That is a rupture.

Whether it becomes a renaissance depends on what happens next. Kiffin must win. Wade must win and stay clean. Ausberry must lead with clarity. Rouse must grow into the job quickly. Dalton must steady the academic house. LSU must prove that its appetite for victory can coexist with competence, transparency and institutional discipline.

But one thing is no longer in doubt. LSU did not spend 2025-26 drifting. It chose a side. It chose urgency over patience, aggression over caution and upside over comfort. It chose to bet that the same chaos that unnerves outsiders can still be harnessed into championships.

That has always been LSU's dangerous gift. In the year everything changed, the gift came roaring back.



# The Day LSU Showed Its Hand

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Executive Editor

If you wanted to know where LSU athletics was headed in 2026, you didn't need another hype video or mission statement — you needed two dates.

**November 30, 2025:** The day LSU ripped off the Band-Aid and hired Lane Kiffin to replace Brian Kelly. That was when the Tigers declared

they were done managing decline and ready to swing for the fences.

**April 23, 2026:** The day the plan came into razor-sharp focus.

On paper, April 23 looked like a routine board meeting: Verge Ausberry named vice president and athletics director. Heath Schroyer slotted into a senior external-relations post. Billy Glasscock installed as football general manager. Will Wade and his new men's basketball staff approved. Bob Starkey and Fitzroy Anthony green-lighted on the women's side. Ticket, parking and Tradition Fund hikes rubber-stamped. Standard governance choreography.

But this was no bureaucratic exercise. It was LSU laying its cards on the table. Kiffin's arrival was the opening move; April 23 was the institutional blueprint. In one sweep, the university showed how it intended to organize, fund and prioritize its athletics empire in the modern era. It was a watershed moment — not because of fireworks or dissent, but because the architecture of a new LSU was exposed for anyone sharp enough to look beyond the names.

Start with football, where the reset truly began. Bringing in Kiffin wasn't just swapping head coaches. It was a posture shift: an aggressive bet on offensive juice, relentless recruiting, roster magnetism and national relevance. LSU acknowledged that college football is now faster, more transactional and brutally competitive — and decided half-measures wouldn't cut it.

Then came the structure around him. Verge Ausberry wasn't a hometown nod; elevating him to AD redefined the role itself. Today's athletic di-

rector is part CEO, part strategist, part negotiator, part fundraiser, part crisis manager — a C-suite executive running a live commercial enterprise inside a public university. By installing Ausberry, LSU signaled that the old, coach-centric model was dead.

Heath Schroyer's external-relations portfolio mattered more than most realized. It meant LSU finally understood that revenue streams, political capital and brand stewardship can't linger in the shadows — they have to be built into the organizational spine. This wasn't just hiring around sports. It was staffing around the business conditions that now govern sports.

Football gave itself away again with Billy Glasscock as general manager. This wasn't window dressing. College football is now a roster economy, complete with NIL math, transfer portals, scholarship calculus and constant attrition. By embracing a GM model, LSU admitted the sport has professionalized, and so must its operations.

Men's basketball was the loudest line item outside football. Will Wade's rehiring wasn't a courtesy call; it was the centerpiece of a full-scale reboot. LSU put its money where its impatience was, assembling a staff designed to drag the program back from irrelevance. This wasn't incremental tinkering — it was a blunt declaration that the Tigers intend to matter in the winter as much as they do in the fall.

But the smartest play of all was what LSU refused to sacrifice. It didn't rebuild men's hoops at the expense

of women's. Bob Starkey and Fitzroy Anthony weren't afterthoughts — they were part of the same blueprint. Kim Mulkey had already pushed LSU women's basketball into the national spotlight. Neglecting that momentum in pursuit of fresh glory would have been institutional malpractice. By affirming both programs, LSU made clear that broad-based excellence was non-negotiable.

And then came the giveaway: ticket, parking and Tradition Fund increases for both men's and women's basketball. That was more than an addendum — it was the day's financial punchline. LSU wasn't merely ratifying commitments; it was positioning itself to generate more from them. More spending paired with higher returns — that is the anatomy of a real reset. Not nostalgia. Not emotion. Economics.

That, above all, was April 23's message: LSU athletics has outgrown yesterday's assumptions. The old, loose-knit, coach-centric department is out. In its place stands a more professional, more expensive and more honest enterprise — aware of what college sports have become and prepared to act accordingly.

November 30 was the first shot across the bow. April 23 was the full reveal. For Tiger Rag's year-in-review, that blueprint may be the most important move LSU athletics made all year: the university showed its hand — and there's no folding now. **TR**



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# Who's In Charge Here?

Are Athletic Director Verge Ausberry And New "Deputy AD"  
Heath Schroyer Really Co-Athletic Directors?

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



On March 30, LSU introduced new basketball coach Will Wade in a press conference at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center that felt and sounded much more like the Final Four pep rally LSU held there the last time the men reached the Final Four – 20 years ago.

There were engineered flames, the LSU band, cheerleaders and hundreds of fans welcoming Wade back. Not as a somewhat rehabilitated NCAA criminal, but as a conquering hero returning to the scene of the crimes after a two-year probationary period as McNeese State's coach and an 11-month, work-release stop at North Carolina State.

But there was something else going on. Newly hired LSU executive deputy athletic director Heath Schroyer, formerly the AD at McNeese who hired Wade from NCAA exile, was holding his own little pep rally.

Technically, new LSU athletic director Verge Ausberry hired Schroyer as one of his deputies. But, in truth, recently hired LSU president Wade Rouse, also formerly of McNeese, hired Schroyer.

Rouse, Schroyer and Wade are part of the McNeese Migration to LSU. Rouse also gave Schroyer an interesting long title – “Senior Deputy Athletic Director and Executive

Director of External Relations of the LSU System.”

Is that Greek for “FUTURE AD?”

Before Wade stepped to the podium, Schroyer worked the room of major donors, Board members and other quiet powers and dignitaries like a pro.

Note when Rouse first became LSU's president on Nov. 4 when Ausberry still had the interim AD title after replacing fired AD Scott Woodward on Oct. 30.

“We'll assess the situation,” Rouse told the Louisiana Illuminator on Nov. 5 when asked if Ausberry will become THE athletic di- *(continued next page)*

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rector. “I can’t make a very good decision after being on the job for eight hours.”

When asked about Ausberry’s contract, Rouse said, “We’re supposed to announce that in days, if we’re going down that road.”

If you go down that road? Someone else in mind?

Rouse was obviously not ready to name Ausberry THE AD. After taking the “interim” tag off of Ausberry, Rouse later called him “the acting athletic director.”

Uh, Mr. Rouse, “acting” and “interim” are the same. Eventually, Ausberry got the full job, perhaps after other powers intervened to the chagrin of Rouse.

Schroyer is a uniquely skilled fund raiser who proved himself with Wade amid post-Hurricane Laura in 2021 Lake Charles. And LSU desperately needs fund raisers to cover a \$62 million buyout bill (\$54 for Brian Kelly, \$8 for Matt McMahon) and its Lane Kiffin-Wade shopping spree.

But Schroyer also got hired as a condition from Wade, who did not accept the job until shortly after LSU hired Schroyer. Governor Jeff Landry and now-LSU Board chairman/ Lake Charles area native Lee Mallett, a friend of Rouse, Schroyer and Wade going back to McNeese days, tried to hire Wade last year. But Woodward blocked that, which was part of the reason he was later fired. Ausberry didn’t want Wade then either. Do Rouse and Mallett also want Ausberry out for Schroyer?

“I can’t even express in words what Dr. Rouse and the administration, everybody has meant to me,” Wade said at the pep rally. “I want to thank Governor Landry. I want to thank our wonderful LSU Board and our great chairman, Lee Mallett.”

Perhaps “The General,” as LSU fans call Wade, remembers Ausberry not being on board a year ago as a slight.

“We’re going to work well together again, get that alignment,” Wade said. “We’ve got Heath here – same chain of command, as Doc (Rouse) likes to say.”

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

Wade barely mentioned Ausberry in his press conference as Kiffin did at his introductory presser several times. Perhaps because Ausberry hired Kiffin. Ausberry didn’t hire Wade or Schroyer.

Perhaps Schroyer is more than a deputy AD.

Just last May at a media gathering with Ausberry, a reporter basically asked if Ausberry and Schroyer had co-athletic director duties. Ausberry bristled and deflected.

Ausberry may bristle more if he clicks onto Heath Schroyer’s Wikipedia page.

Under Schroyer’s “Administrative Career (AD unless noted)” entry, it says:

2021-2024 McNeese State

2026-Present LSU

An LSU official was notified of this on June 5. As of late June, it was not changed.



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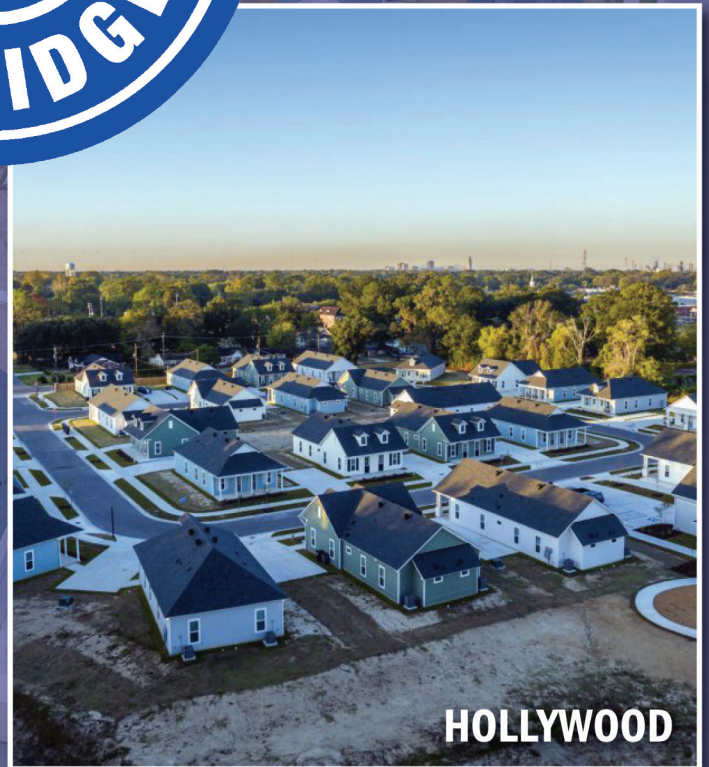


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# Jay Johnson Strategically Selects More Well-Rounded Players From Portal This Time

Lineup Comes Into Focus With SS Steven Milam Returning

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU baseball coach Jay Johnson recruited portal position players this year with versatility in mind as opposed to only offensive numbers last year in a portal class that failed. “This group has speed, power, solid hitting skills and play good defense,” Johnson said. “Guys who can impact on both sides of the ball. They’re more complete players.”

The four position additions were sophomore shortstop Dawson Park of Texas State (expected to move to third

base), sophomore left fielder Bino Watters of Notre Dame (No. 1 portal player in nation), junior second baseman Cade Kurland of Florida and junior right fielder Jason Wachs of Tulane. Johnson also added freshmen right-handed pitchers Diego Velazquez of USC and Landon Hood of Gonzaga.

And two-year starting shortstop Steven Milam is skipping the July 11-12 MLB Draft to return for his senior season.

Here is a position-by-position look for 2027. (Grade classifications from 2026.)

## FIRST BASE

**NOT RETURNING:** Sr. Zach Yorke, .226, 6 HRs, 19 RBIs, 5 errors.

**RETURNING:** Soph. Mason Braun, .314, 3 HRs, 21 RBIs, 0 errors; Jr. Edward Yamin IV, .220, 2 HRs, 7 RBIs, 0 errors.

## SECOND BASE

**NOT RETURNING:** Sr. Seth Dardar, .260, 5 HRs, 29 RBIs, 5 errors; Jr. Trent

Caraway, TRANSFER PORTAL, .243, 2 HRs, 16 RBIs, 2 errors; Sr. Brayden Simpson, .265, 1 HR, 9 RBIs, 0 errors.

**RETURNING:** Fr. Jack Ruckert, .232, 0 HRs, 9 RBIs, 5 errors.

**PORTAL:** Jr. Cade Kurland, Florida, .279, 9 HRs, 33 RBIs, 1 error.

### SHORTSTOP

**RETURNING:** Jr. Steven Milam, .296, 11 HRs, 49 RBIs, 4 errors.

### THIRD BASE

**NOT RETURNING:** Jr. Trent Caraway, TRANSFER PORTAL, .243, 2 HRs, 16 RBIs, 2 errors; Sr. Seth Dardar, .260, 5 HRs, 29 RBIs, 5 errors; Sr. Tanner Reaves, .209, 0 HRs, 6 RBIs, 4 errors; Fr. Ethan Clauss, TRANSFER PORTAL, .250, 0 HRs, 1 RBI, 2 errors.

**RETURNING:** Soph. John Pearson, .254, 8 HRs, 24 RBIs, 8 errors.

**PORTAL:** Soph. Dawson Park, Texas State, .301, 13 HRs, 52 RBIs, 10 errors senior season.

### CATCHER

**RETURNING:** Soph. Cade Arrambide, .317, 18 HRs, 51 RBIs, 5 errors; Fr. Omar Serna Jr., .308, 9 HRs, 37 RBIs, 5 errors; Jr. Edward Yamin IV, .220, 2 HRs, 7 RBIs, 0 errors.

### DESIGNATED HITTER

**NOT RETURNING:** Sr. Zach Yorke, .226, 6 HRs, 19 RBIs; Sr. Seth Dardar, .260, 5 HRs, 29 RBIs.

**RETURNING:** Fr. Mason Braun, .314, 3 HRs, 21 RBIs; Fr. Omar Serna Jr., .308, 9 HRs, 37 RBIs; Soph. Cade Arrambide, .317, 18 HRs, 51 RBIs; Soph. John Pear-

son, .254, 8 HRs, 24 RBIs; Jr. Edward Yamin IV, .220, 2 HRs, 7 RBIs.

### LEFT FIELD

**NOT RETURNING:** Sr. Chris Stanfield, .228, 3 HRs, 12 RBIs; Jr. Daniel Harden, TRANSFER PORTAL, .105, 1 HR, 2 RBIs, 0 errors.

**PORTAL:** Soph. Bino Watters, Notre Dame, .362, 10 HRs, 51 RBIs.

### CENTER FIELD

**NOT RETURNING:** Soph. Derek Curriel, MLB DRAFT likelihood as draft-eligible sophomore, .353, 6 HRs, 46 RBIs.

**RETURNING:** Fr. William Patrick, .220, 0 HRs, 6 RBIs, 1 error.

### RIGHT FIELD

**NOT RETURNING:** Jr. Jake Brown, MLB DRAFT likelihood, .309, 16 HRs, 49 RBIs.

**PORTAL:** Soph. Jason Wachs, Tulane, .327, 9 HRs, 54 RBIs.

### PITCHING STAFF

**NOT RETURNING:** Sr. Grant Fontenot, 0-2, 4.18 ERA, 3 saves; Soph. Mavrick Rizy, TRANSFER PORTAL, 0-0, 4.22 ERA; Redshirt Soph. Deven Sheerin, MLB DRAFT likelihood, 3-2, 4.78 ERA, 5 saves; Sr. Zac Cowan, 3-3, 5.32 ERA, 1 save; Jr. Santiago Garcia, MLB DRAFT possibility, 1-1, 5.96 ERA, 2 saves; Jr. Gavin Guidry, MLB DRAFT possibility, 5-3, 6.39 ERA, 1 save; Jr. Jaden Noot, TRANSFER PORTAL, 0-0, 6.75 ERA, 1 save; Junior DJ Primeaux, TRANSFER PORTAL, 0-0, 7.71 ERA; Sr. Dax Dathe, 0-0, 8.53 ERA; Sr. Connor Bengue, 2-0, 9.00 ERA.

**RETURNING:** Jr. Cooper Moore, 3-3, 3.38 ERA; Soph. William Schmidt, 5-4, 4.22 ERA; Fr. Reagan Ricken, 0-0, 4.66 ERA; Fr. Zion Theophilus, 0-0, 4.96 ERA; Soph. Casan Evans, 2-4, 5.93 ERA; Soph. Danny Lachenmayer, 2-1, 7.56 ERA; Soph. Cooper Williams, 1-1, 7.94 ERA; Fr. Marcos Paz, 1-4, 9.20 ERA; Soph. Ethan Plog, 2-0, 9.98 ERA.

**PORTAL:** Fr. right-hander Landon Hood, Gonzaga, 3-1, 2.48 ERA, 5 saves; Fr. right-hander Diego Velazquez, USC, 5-1, 4.26 ERA.

### **TOP HIGH SCHOOL COMMITMENTS FOR 2027, PENDING MLB DRAFT:**

**PITCHERS:** Left-hander Logan Schmidt, Aliso Viejo, California; left-hander Lucas Nawrocki, Aledo, Texas, left-hander Spencer Evans, Ocoee, Fla.; right-hander Kolby Stringer, Foxworth, Mississippi; right-hander Jensen Hirschhorn, Kingsburg, California, right-hander Cooper Sides, Orange, California; right-hander Dylan Blomker, Albuquerque, New Mexico; right-hander Coleton Brady, North Collins, New York; left-hander Braxton Beaty, Angleton, Texas (who has taken name out of MLB Draft).

**OUTFIELDERS:** Malachi Washington, Stone Mountain, Georgia; Anthony Murphy, Corona, California; Wessley Robertson, Brunswick, Georgia; Nathaneal Davis, Orlando, Florida.

**INFIELDERS:** First baseman Dominic Santarelli, Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin; first baseman Will Adams, Hoover, Alabama; shortstop Cole Weinsten, Newport Beach, California; shortstop Parker Loew, Jacksonville, Florida.

**CATCHER:** Masen Belding, Grass Valley, California. **TR**

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Kylee Edwards  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# LSU Softball Finished Strong In Reaching Super Regional

But Coach Beth Torina Needs Her No. 3 Recruiting Class to Absorb Key Portal Losses

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



LSU Softball Coach Beth Torina  
Photo by: LSU Athletics

The LSU softball team improved over the 2025 season by reaching the NCAA Super Regional round before getting swept at No. 1 Alabama.

The Tigers finished 40-19 overall and 13-11 in the Southeastern Conference for their first above-.500 league finish since 2023.

“Another week would have been cool, but I’m glad for this one,” coach Beth Torina said. “I am incredibly proud of this team. I am glad I got this week with them. I thought we showed a ton of growth throughout the season, and I’m excited about what’s in front of them.”

Excited because Torina was expecting to return ace sophomore pitcher Jayden Heavener, who was easily LSU’s best and most-used pitcher with a 13-9 record and 2.81 ERA and 128 strikeouts in 139 and a third innings. But Heavener transferred to Texas Tech.

And Torina thought she would have back sophomore starting first baseman Tori Edwards and junior starting short-stop Kylee Edwards (no relation). Tori led LSU in 2026 with 12 home runs and hit .284 with 45 RBIs and nine stolen bases, while Kylee hit .341 with 10 home runs and 40 RBIs. But both entered the transfer portal.

Torina also lost six backups to the portal in sophomore catcher Jada Phillips, freshman infielder Gradie Appling, sophomore outfielder Destiny Harris, junior outfielder Jaydn Laneaux, freshman pitcher Lauren Soeken and junior utility player Maddox McKee, who transferred to Texas A&M.

Now, Torina did sign a No. 3 recruiting class of seven players last November. But the loss of Heavener and McKee to other schools and the two Edwards players entering the portal stung.

Suddenly, though, Torina turned the tide and signed her first portal import in Notre Dame outfielder Mickey Winchell, who will be a senior. Winchell, who is from Livermore, California, near San Francisco, batted .335 in 2026 and led the Irish with 14 stolen bases and 59 hits. She also had a .418 on-base average.

And then bam, Torina got back Kylee Edwards, who exited the portal and returned to LSU’s roster.

Some of the departures may have happened because Torina signed that No. 3 recruiting class in the nation for 2027, according to D1 Softball and Softball America/Rivals.

Those seven signees are catcher Samantha Alekman of El Dorado Hills, California, infielder Giselle De Casas of Hayward, California, pitcher Addie Rackley of Buford, Georgia, outfielder Adelynn Siegel of Shiner, Texas, pitcher Ayla Tuua of Murieta, California, catcher Karmen Vazquez of Hanford, California, and outfielder Sydnee Williams of Phoenix.

According to Softball America/Rivals, Alekman is a four-star prospect and the No. 3 catcher in California, De Casas is a three-star prospect, Rackley is a five-star player and the No. 9 prospect in the nation, Siegel is a four-star outfielder, Tuua is the No. 9-ranked pitcher, Vazquez is the No. 4 player in California, and Williams is the No. 3 outfielder in the country. **TR**

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Dan Hayes  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



# LSU Spring Sports

LSU Track Teams Shine At NCAA Championships,  
And So Do Men's And Women's Golf And Women's Tennis

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor



LSU Men's Golf Coach. Jake Amos. Photo by: LSU Athletics

How wild was the LSU men's golf team's 18-under scramble to make the cut at the NCAA Championships on May 31 in Carlsbad, California?

Coach Jake Amos had booked his team's flight home for Monday, June 1.

But LSU's 18-under score moved the Tigers up 15 spots from a tie for 27th at 20 over to a tie for 12th place at 2-over par to make the 54-hole cut with three spots to spare.

Leading the charge was Manchester, England, freshman Dan Hayes, who fired an 8-under 64 as he birdied five of his last six holes. Hayes not only moved up 84 spots on the leaderboard to a tie for 32nd at 1-under 215, he shot the lowest NCAA Tournament round in school history, bettering the mark of 65 (-7) by John Peterson at the 2011 NCAA Championships in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

"It is just kind of the proudest I've ever been of any team," Amos said. "I

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## SPORTS PHYSICALS: WHAT TO EXPECT

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With fall sports and a new school year around the corner, many kids and their parents will be heading to the doctor's office for their yearly physical. Here is what you need to know about physicals, including why you should get one, what to expect and how to prepare.

### The Benefits of Physicals

Physicals are beneficial to ensure the body is developing normally and catching any issues before becoming a real problem. Sports physicals differ from regular physicals because they are usually more limited and specific to athletics. However, they help ensure that you or your teen is healthy and fit enough to participate in sports.

Physicals also give you the chance to discuss any health concerns that you may have. Your health practitioner can take your health history into account to provide more specific advice and help for any concerns.

A sports physical can help you avoid any issues that might keep you from participating in your chosen sport. Your doctor can evaluate you for any conditions, such as an old or minor injury so that it won't be exacerbated or result in a re-injury.

Physicals are also a chance for your health practitioner to recommend medication or remedies that can help keep any conditions under control, such as asthma. It also gives them a chance to ensure that vaccinations are up to date and you meet all the eligibility requirements.

### What to Expect at a Sports Physical

When you go in to get your physical, your doctor will review your history and

perform any necessary tests to ensure you are fit and healthy. During your visit, you should expect to:

- Review medical history, including family history
- Discuss any dietary supplements, medication, or prescriptions you are taking
- Check ears, nose, throat, lungs, heart, etc.
- Perform a vision test
- Take height and weight
- Take blood pressure and pulse
- Evaluate flexibility, joints, posture, and strength
- Take urine test

Depending on any concerns you have, the entire process should take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes.

### How to Prepare for Your Physical

Some of the ways you can prepare for your physical include:

- Write down any concerns or questions you have ahead of time. It is easy to forget to ask something at the moment
- Make a note of any supplements, medications, or prescriptions you are currently taking
- Verify your vaccinations to see if any are overdue. If this is your first time visiting, you may want to bring your vaccination records

An annual physical is a critical part of staying healthy. If you or your children are participating in sports, walk-in or book an appointment online with any of our locations, so we can you keep in top shape!



Taylor Riley. Photo by: LSU Athletics

booked our flights before the round. I'm just going to tell you. Tigers don't quit, and we didn't. We finally showed the firepower this team has. But our message, seriously, was, 'Let's just see what we can do. No pressure just be super aggressive.'"

LSU ended up finishing in 12th the next day.

The women's golf team missed the 54-hole cut by one stroke, but senior Taylor Riley reached final round play and finished in a tie for 30th.

Meanwhile, the women's tennis team reached the NCAA quarterfinals.

The men's track team finished fourth in the NCAA Championships as sprinter Jaiden Reid won the 200 meters with an NCAA record time of 19.63.

The women's track team finished 10th at the NCAA Championships as sprinter Shawnti Jackson won two silvers and a bronze. **TR**

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**Todd Horne**  
Vice President / Executive Editor

If you're an LSU fan, you watched this year unfold in real time: the firings, the hires, the statements, the leaks, the planes, the politics, the pressure. But here's the part most fans never hear out loud.

Everything LSU did this year wasn't just aimed at the public. It was aimed at the donor class.

And the message LSU sent to its biggest check writers was blunt, unapologetic, and impossible to miss: **the era of patience is over. The era of acceleration has begun.**

Brian Kelly's firing wasn't simply a football decision. It was LSU telling donors, "We know this isn't good enough, and we're willing to pay whatever it costs to fix it." A \$54 million buyout isn't a coaching change. It's a signal flare. It's LSU admitting that the future was arriving faster than the program could keep up—and that falling behind was more expensive than pulling the trigger.

Then came the moment that told donors everything they needed to know: Scott Woodward's removal. Woodward was the architect of LSU's modern trophy haul. He delivered Mulkey, Johnson, Clark. He delivered championships. But he also delivered the most expensive football contract in school history, and when that contract blew up, the political class stepped in.

When the governor publicly joked he'd let Donald Trump pick LSU's next coach before Woodward did, that wasn't a punchline. It was a power message. It told donors the state was taking the wheel. And days later, Woodward was gone.

That wasn't a transition. That was a correction.

## What LSU Was Telling Its Donors — And What It Means For You

Then LSU split the presidency and chancellorship for the first time since 2012. That wasn't an academic reorganization. That was LSU telling donors, "We're putting someone—Wade Rouse—closer to athletics, closer to government relations, closer to the heat you feel every time football drifts."

Dalton was brought in to stabilize academics. Rouse was brought in to manage everything donors actually care about.

And then LSU elevated Verge Ausberry, the most experienced internal operator in the building, while publicly fumbling his title. Interim? Acting? Permanent? It changed by the hour. Agents smelled weakness. Coaches sensed confusion. Donors saw the leverage problem immediately.

But Ausberry delivered anyway. He landed Lane Kiffin.

And that hire was LSU's clearest message to the donor class all year: **we're done pretending we can win with caution.** Kiffin's expected seven year, \$91 million deal wasn't a contract. It was a declaration. LSU is going to spend like a program that expects to win now.

And here's the part fans need to understand: **Kiffin is expected to win in Year 1. But he has to be winning by Year 2.** Not "improving." Not "building." Winning. That's the standard LSU just sold to its donors. That's the timeline LSU just committed to. That's the pressure LSU just placed on its own investment.

Then LSU detonated the basketball world by bringing Will Wade home.

You don't bring back a coach you fired in scandal unless you've accepted the new marketplace for what it is: a legalized arms race where roster construction matters more than reputation management. Donors didn't blink. They understood the calcu-

lation. Wade wins. Wade recruits. Wade builds fast. And in the new SEC, irrelevance is more dangerous than controversy.

Put all six moves together and the pattern becomes unmistakable: LSU no longer has time for slow fixes. NIL, revenue sharing, transfer freedom and media money have compressed the sport into a high speed, high cost marketplace. Mistakes cost more. Drift costs the most.

So LSU accelerated. It fired. It hired. It reorganized. It absorbed political pressure and donor urgency. It gambled that aggression, not caution, would restore momentum.

But acceleration raises the cost of failure.

Kiffin must win immediately. Wade must win and stay clean. Ausberry must govern without ambiguity. Rouse must grow into the job faster than any LSU president in modern history. Dalton must steady the academic house while athletics consumes oxygen.

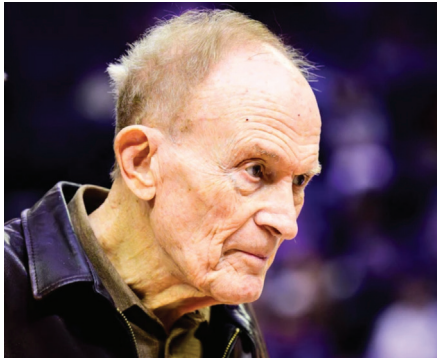
This year wasn't a transition. It was a reckoning. LSU finally told its donors the truth: the institution they fund is no longer built for patience. It is built for velocity. It is built for risk. It is built for ambition.

And now the fan base needs to understand the same thing.

LSU didn't drift through 2025–26. It chose a side. It chose speed. It chose danger. It chose the path that demands results, not explanations. The curtain didn't fall. LSU tore it down. And now everyone—donors, fans, administrators, coaches—has to live in the light.

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



Dale Brown  
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

## Don't Wait For Others To Solve The Problems Of Our Country

Samuel Adams, another one of our Founding Fathers, wrote:

“If ever a time should come when vain and aspiring men shall possess the highest seats in government, our country will stand in need of its experienced patriots to prevent its ruin.”

Public awareness and action to demand change is the only method of preserving our freedoms. Now is that time because Congress has become a haven for far too many narcissistic politicians for whom self-promotion, self-preservation and greed have taken over.

### GOD BLESS AMERICA, BUT WAKE UP AMERICA

You might be asking yourself, “What can little ole me do?” Just remember, nobody makes a greater mistake than he who would do nothing because he could do only a little. For far too long, we have looked to others to solve the problems of our country, and that’s not working.

Great social transformation – such as the end of slavery, the women’s and civil rights movements and the end of colonial rule – all began with public awareness and engagement. These movements were started by the determined actions of small numbers of courageous and committed citizens.

Have you ever noticed that if any one of us lies to Congress, it’s a crime? But if someone in Congress lies to us, it is just considered politics as usual. Frankly, I believe candidates from both parties have lied to the American people. It has become standard operating procedure for many politicians to say whatever is necessary to get elected. This must stop.

Ronald Reagan acknowledged the problem when he said:

“Politics is supposed to be the second-oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears a very close resemblance to the first.”

If we don’t demand honesty and integrity from America’s leadership now – and reward that integrity with our votes – our leaders will lack the fortitude to make the hard decisions that must be made to change course.

Our nation is in a state of crisis, and we need to change before it is too late to choose the direction of that change.

We need the best possible people in office to make this happen.

Let’s take some action now to demand change. The easiest path is to think someone else will get it done, but that will not happen.

We must create the changes we wish to see.

*(Editor’s Note: This is an excerpt from “The Little Book Of Motivation” by former LSU basketball coach Dale Brown that was published in 2025.)*

Never have I seen the American public so disgusted and fed up with our Congress. Partisan politics, negative campaigning, and one scandal after another is literally sickening our people.

It is clear to me that we must cleanse a system that is totally dysfunctional and out of control. There is no doubt that we have lost or moral compass. Far too many politicians do not measure up to their self-righteous rhetoric. We need to hold politicians accountable by voting them out of office.

Correcting any problem begins by facing it head on and not hiding behind partisan politics or political correctness. We have a right to demand candidates who will lead, and at the same time listen to we the people who elect them. As Thomas Jefferson said:

“The federal government is our servant, nor our master.”

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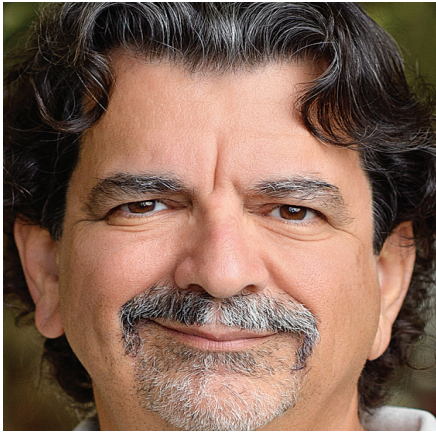
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**Jim Kleinpeter**  
*Tiger Rag Featured Columnist*

The latest chapter in the panic over the future of college sports in general - and football in this specific instance - was one of real concern.

The NCAA was rendered powerless in the quarterback Brendan Sorsby-to-Texas-Tech case and college football got it right, even if it was by accident. LSU sports administration and the SEC should be taking notes because gambling is the biggest existential threat to sports at any level.

I have written previously in this space that a lot of the “sky is falling” sentiment that is raised every time a player is awarded a seventh season of eligibility, or transfers into a big money NIL deal, or the playoffs are expanded, is misplaced.

College sports are surviving and prospering. The product in the various arenas continues to get better and the method for determining a champion - in football at least - becomes more credible. What else do you want?

The big changes have seemingly come crashing in all at the same time, but the adults in the room will ultimately sort it all out. They will come up first with an enforcement body they must all respect and then a set of rules that makes sense. Of course, that could mean the power football schools going their own way with a separate league or division.

But gambling is different. It creates an entirely different set of off-the-field

## Gambling Is The Biggest Threat To College Sports

problems on multiple levels, including law enforcement and the integrity of the game. It would seem like a slam-dunk to keep a player who has admitted a gambling addiction that caused him to place 9,000 bets, 40 on his own Indiana team, on the sidelines.

Yet, there are people out there trying to game the system right up to edges of ethical behavior. Cody Campbell is the billionaire Tech booster providing the bucks behind this effort, and Teach also made Stanford softball pitcher NiJaree Canady the first \$1 million athlete in that sport.

And then there's his buddy, Texas attorney general Ken Paxton, who made a really dumb move.

Let's set the stage: The NCAA declared Sorsby ineligible. Texas judge Ken Curry granted Sorsby a temporary restraining order, answering his Hail Mary play. Sorsby's argument was that his addiction was a mental health issue, and he would be adversely impacted. Without being allowed his day in court.

The Big 12 responded with multiple emergency meetings of member schools, who were 11-1 against Texas Tech and Sorsby. Then Paxton stepped in and inadvertently settled the matter for both sides.

Paxton's threatening letter, warning the Big 12 of massive legal action if it tried to enforce its own rules by declaring Sorsby ineligible, opened the door for a plea to federal court. It started in the early hours of Monday, June 15 and by the end of the day, Sorsby was looking at the NFL's upcoming supplemental draft and Tech was re-evaluating its quarterback situation.

Without that letter, the Big 12 would have had to take on a case it probably wouldn't have won while creating weekly negative headlines throughout the season. But then Paxton's threat opened the door for a response in federal court where none previously existed.

That sound you heard on the news was college football dodging a bullet and saving itself a lot of ugly pain for the upcoming season. Paxton didn't help his U.S. Senate campaign while blowing up Sorsby's chances of seeing the field.

Sorsby may be done for good because the NFL sure doesn't want fresh gambling issue in its backyard. I'm sure every team has been notified what the consequences might be if they want to take a chance on Sorsby.

College football got the right result, and it came with a silver lining. The result of this ordeal perhaps will re-emphasize the importance of the schools that make up college sports sticking together with standards applicable to all.

They also need to make sure they have some ironclad rules regarding gambling that every school will follow, and none will try to exploit. That's what's going on in college sports right now. The changing landscape requires some deep thought and careful planning, or even a school like LSU could find itself in an embarrassing position.

Not that it hasn't already.

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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*

LSU is frequently a pacesetter for the SEC and the nation. The Ole War Skule not surprisingly is positioned at the epicenter of the debate of the new and “improved” landscape for college sports factories. Imperial coaches on campus are ranked in the top one-tenth of one percent in salary for Louisiana workers and LSU’s NIL budget hovers close to \$50 million for football in 2026.

Nostalgic yearning for good ole days of players receiving books, board and tuition and payments from benevolent boosters under the table has spurred a state of dismay. Many fans are incensed with the average take home pay for a student-athlete running under the south goalposts this fall approaching one half million dollars.

The figure is stunning, but it is under four percent of the amount LSU is rewarding Brian Kelly not to coach here for the next six years. The environment is so convoluted that Ed Orgeron was sent away with a \$17 million gift not to patrol the sidelines for the Tigers in 2023. Now he is receiving \$100,000 to return to the staff at Death Valley three years later.

On the players’ side, former Tiger recruit T.J. Finley is the poster guy for unlimited transfers. The quarterback from Ponchatoula who started at LSU as a freshman for Coach O. migrated to Auburn in 2021 and 2022, to Texas State in 2023, to Western Kentucky in 2024, to Tulane and Georgia State in 2025 and then to Incarnate Word.

It is reasonable to allow one transfer with no action and to require a year on the sidelines for subsequent transfers. But any adjustment to the portal should also apply to head coaches who leave a second school to pursue success at another university.

Nick Saban would have been okay under this system because he left as head man at Toledo to become defensive coordinator for the Cleveland Browns. He then migrated to Michigan

## LSU Is Name, Image & Likeness Laboratory

State, led the Spartans for five seasons before arriving at LSU. The next college move to Alabama from the Miami Dolphins after two seasons would also be permitted because there was no direct defection from LSU to Alabama.

Lane Kiffin is a different story. He left Tennessee to go to USC where he was fired in a decision beyond his control. His one free move was taken when he departed Florida Atlantic for Ole Miss in 2020. Thus, Kiffin would need to sit out this season at LSU and become leader of the Tigers in 2027 under the same prospective rules for head coaches and their recruits.

Is it fair for players to be held to one standard and coaches another?

This observer has no quarrel with the market dictating salaries for those who participate in college sports. Yet it is a travesty to sanction unlimited movement of the game’s stars from one university to another. Any semblance of amateurism and allegiance to an alma mater is lost in the process.

### LSU Brass Should Accent SEC Supremacy

LSU compensates its coaches in the four most expensive sports at a level equal to or greater than any competitor in the country. Lane Kiffin, Will Wade, Kim Mulkey and Jay Johnson are paid handsomely to win championships.

Mulkey has the 2023 national crown on her mantle while Johnson has twice captured the College World Series title. There remains a void because the Tigers have not collected the SEC championship in any of the Big Four budget sports in seven years. Johnson and Mulkey are in pursuit of their first league championships.

The last SEC title won by a coach in football, men’s basketball, women’s basketball or baseball was in 2019. That was the year of the magical run for Ed Orgeron’s Bengals, who beat Alabama 46-41 for the right to play in the SEC Championship game where LSU destroyed Georgia 37-10.

The last time LSU won SEC honors in men’s basketball was also in 2019 when Wade’s scandal plagued operation performed brilliantly to win the first LSU men’s crown in more than a decade.

The LSU women have not won the SEC title since Van Winston Chancellor posted a 14-0 league record in 2008. This was accomplished when the Lady Tigers beat No. 1 Tennessee 78-62 at Knoxville on Valentine’s Day of 2008 in one of the top two all-time victories for the program. This season marks 19 years since that epic achievement.

LSU baseball has not won the SEC since Paul Mainieri collected his fourth regular season conference crown in 2017. He also won in 2009, 2012 and 2015.

The league pinnacle is elusive. Sue Gunter was a fine coach who never reached it in 22 seasons at the PMAC where her name is etched into the court. Any assessment of coaching greatness at LSU should start with conference supremacy.

The LSU brass has provided a splendid salute to the LSU football champions in the conference on the west side of Tiger Stadium. The teams from 1935, 1936, 1958, 1961, 1970, 1986, 1988, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2019 are heralded in grand fashion.

A similar presentation outside the PMAC should accompany the league basketball kings and queens for men and women. The LSU men won the SEC and national championships in 1935 under Harry Rabenhorst, who also directed his teams to conference glory in 1946, 1953 and 1954. Dale Brown was SEC champ in 1979, 1981, 1985 and 1990. John Brady won in 2000 and 2006.

LSU boasts 12 SEC titles in both football and men’s basketball. In addition to Chancellor’s triumph in 2008, Dana “Pokey” Chatman won the SEC in 2005 and 2006 to account for three SEC Women’s Basketball regular season titles.

Skip Bertman won five CWS tournaments for national supremacy and added seven SEC titles in 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1997. Paul Mainieri accomplished the feat to rule the league in 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2017. The Bengals also prevailed on the SEC diamond in 1939, 1943, 1946, 1961, 1975 and 2003 for a total of 17 league titles.

Nine LSU Coaches in Big 4 sports have won multiple SEC championships:

Coach/SEC Crowns

Skip Bertman/7 in Baseball

Harry Rabenhorst/6

(4 in Men’s Basketball and 2 in Baseball, 1939 and 1946)

Dale Brown/4 in Men’s Basketball

John Brady/2 in Men’s Basketball

Pokey Chatman/in Women’s Basketball

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