



# THE LEGENDS ISSUE

# TIGER MAG

SEPTEMBER 2026 • VOLUME 49, ISSUE 9

## SKIP BERTMAN

1938-2026

# EVERYTHING MATTERED

THE COACH WHO BUILT CHAMPIONS,  
TRANSFORMED LSU BASEBALL  
AND LEFT SOMETHING LARGER  
THAN TROPHIES BEHIND

## BERT JONES

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Our annual Legends  
issue: LSU bids  
farewell to a giant,  
J. Stanley Bertman  
(1938-2026), known  
to all as "Skip"



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Photo by: LSU Athletics





**Glenn Guilbeau**  
*Tiger Rag Editor*

**Not Bernie Moore.**

**Not Paul Dietzel.**

**Not Nick Saban.**

**Not Lane Kiffin.**

Skip Bertman is the greatest hire in the history of LSU Athletics.

And it was LSU athletic director Bob Brodhead who hired Bertman, an associate head coach/pitching coach for the Miami Hurricanes from 1976-83 with a national championship in 1982.

The story made the front page of the Baton Rouge Advocate on Tuesday, April 26, 1983, but it was a press release.

"The potential for a superlative program is here. This opportunity is a once-in-a-lifetime chance," Bertman, 44, said.

"We are going to have LSU at the top of the heap in all sports," Brodhead said. "Skip will be the man to accomplish this in baseball."

But Brodhead's second sentence was only partially right. Bertman became that five times over in baseball as his Tigers won the 1991, '93, '96, '97 and 2000 national championships. But he was so much more to LSU.

Bertman died on Aug. 14, at age 88 in Baton Rouge of a heart condition. He coached the baseball team from 1984-2001 and was athletic director from 2001-2008.

While AD, he hired four coaches who would win national championships - Les Miles in football in 2007 with a national

## Skip Bertman Was More Than A Baseball Coach ... He Was The LSU Athletic Department's Greatest Hire Of All Time

title game appearance in the 2011 season, Paul Mainieri in baseball in 2009 with a title series appearance in 2017, Dennis Shaver in women's outdoor track in 2008 and men's outdoor in 2021, and Chuck Winstead in men's golf in 2015.

That's 10 national championships in four sports from one coach/athletic director from 1991-2021 at one school. That's the Midas touch.

Pat Henry won 27 national championships while coaching men's and women's track from 1988-2004, but there were four national title possibilities every season as he coached men and women with track having separate indoor, outdoor titles. Henry is the greatest track coach of all time, but he never hired head coaches.

And he didn't build stadiums.

It was Bertman who got the new Alex Box Stadium in 2009 after working on that for years before becoming AD. From 1996-2001 with Bertman coaching, the old Alex Box led the nation in attendance in six consecutive seasons.

And in his second year as AD in 2003 after retiring as coach following the 2001 season, it was Bertman who did what no LSU athletic director in history did, or wanted to do. He directed a game of musical seats with the former 91,600 capacity Tiger Stadium.

It was Bertman who brought LSU Football out of the antiquated age of football season ticket sales and into the future of the very profitable and drastically needed revenue stream of season ticket licensing. That requires present and future season ticket holders to pay hundreds or thousands just for the right to be able to buy season tickets.

"We were so far behind. We were an outlier," Scott Woodward said on June 19, 2019, shortly after leaving Texas A&M to

be LSU's AD. Woodward had been director of external operations from 2000-04 under LSU chancellor Mark Emmert as the Bertman Ticket Doctrine began.

Bertman had to move large groups of season ticket holders who had passed down their tickets to family members for generations.

"It was seen as a radical thing at first," Woodward said.

"We're going to put in a football seating license plan," Bertman told LSU associate athletic director for communications Herb Vincent at the time. "And they're going to fire me."

But Bertman's business, marketing and media savvy pushed it through in August of 2003 with a 15-1 Board vote. Then coach Nick Saban's Tigers went 13-1 for LSU's first national championship in football since 1958.

"Winning has a good way of curing a ticket price increase," Woodward smiled. "We kept waiting for this uproar about the ticket licensing, and it never happened."

Invoices for the new expensive season tickets went out two weeks after LSU beat Oklahoma, 21-14, for the title.

"Skip's ticket plan is what brought us into the 21st century," Board member Stanley Jacobs said.

Yes, Skip Bertman was truly a man for all seasons - arguably the Greatest Of All Time college baseball coach and easily the G.O.A.T. of LSU Athletics.

---

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).





## Everything Mattered to Skip Bertman From The Very Beginning

By Glenn Guilbeau, Tiger Rag Editor

One of Skip Bertman's original assistant coaches, John "Muggsy" Mugarian said it all in an email on the day coach Bertman died, which was at 1:12 a.m. on Friday, Aug. 14, in Baton Rouge.

"Coach had an incredibly difficult task in front of him," Mugarian began. "He had to get the administration, the community, the fans, the players - and even the coaching staff - to believe. After our first staff meeting, none of us knew quite what to expect."

As they left the meeting in the dingy coach's office next to the dingy locker

room, everyone stepped aside a small piece of trash on the floor.

"None of us noticed it," Mugarian wrote. "Coach suddenly turned around and said sternly, 'Pick that up!' All four assistants were stunned, scared, and reached down at the same time in a panic to pick up that tiny piece of paper. Coach then said in that stern voice, 'It's the small details that matter. It's attention to detail. And if I can't get you guys to do it, how do we expect the players to do it?' And with that, the lesson began."

### LSU FINANCIAL PLANS

Steven Hotho reacted to executive editor Todd Horne's deep dive into LSU's new financial plans on Aug. 8.

"This is another example of the demise of college football as I've known it and loved it through the years. It, obviously, is no longer amateur but, clearly, professional. This kind of endeavor would seal that trend and, in the process, lose a lot more fans."



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**Jacques Doucet**  
@JacquesDoucet

The legend, the goat, our beloved Stanley "Skip" Bertman passed away peacefully at 1:12 am surrounded by his daughters at Baton Rouge General Hospital.

Legendary LSU Coach and Athletic Director Skip Bertman dies at age 88



**LSU Tigers**  
@LSUSports

We mourn today the passing of LSU legend Skip Bertman, the greatest coach in college baseball history, a visionary leader, and one of the most impactful figures in the evolution of collegiate athletics.



**Todd Horne**  
@racertodd

## LSU Baseball Master Legend Skip Bertman Passes Away



**Ben McDonald**  
@realbenmcdonald

My heart is broken this morning....we have lost Coach Bertman. The best to ever fill out a lineup card....the man who changed college baseball forever and the man who built the best baseball program in the country

As great a coach he was, even a better man that touched countless lives! So thankful I got to see him last night and tell him how much I loved him 1 more time!



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*Juliet*  
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**Hezly Rivera**

Photo by: Hezly Rivera Instagram



## LSU Gymnastics Commitment Hezly Rivera Wins At US Championship; Kim Mulkey Has Difficult Schedule

LSU Has A Difficult Path In 2026, But It Didn't Make Top 5 Most Difficult List

By KACE KIEISCHNICK, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

LSU gymnastics commitment Hezly Rivera won back-to-back U.S. women's gymnastics titles in Phoenix in early August. She became the only

gymnast not named Simone Biles to achieve the feat in the last 13 years, and she did it in historic comeback fashion.

The 18-year-old Hackensack, New Jersey, native sat in fourth place at the conclusion of the first night of the two-day competition. She totaled a



score of 55.00 through her first rotation, thanks to a fall on the uneven bars. She trailed the leaders Skye Blakely and Claire Pease by six-tenths of a point.

In the last 20 U.S. women's all-around championships leading up to the event, the day one leader went on to win 18 times. Rivera completed the first comeback from fourth or worst to first since 2003.

Her final score was 111.95 points, 1.15 ahead of Pease in second place. Rivera earned gold on balance beam (28.700), a silver medal on floor exercise (28.300) and recorded the highest single vault score of the evening with a 14.400.

Rivera was the youngest U.S. Olympian at the 2024 Paris Games. As a 16-year-old then she did not compete in the women's gymnastics team final, but she is now ready to make her mark on the global stage.

The two-time U.S. champ did not get to compete at the World Games in 2025 because of a sprained ankle. She will compete in a qualifying event for October's World Championship Sept. 29-Oct. 1 and look to make the five-woman team. Results from nationals will factor in to who makes the cut.

Rivera's eyes, though, are set on the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. The recent high school graduate plans to delay her enrollment at LSU until after the games.



### Kim Mulkey's Toughest Non-Conference Schedule

The LSU women's basketball team could be in for its toughest non-conference schedule of the Kim Mulkey era. Since Mulkey took over in the 2021-2022 season, the Lady Tigers have faced only one non-conference schedule that ranked higher than 116th in the nation. That was the No. 21 strength of schedule mark in 2024-2025.

The 2026-27 schedule will rival that as it features five NCAA tournament teams from last season — two more than Mulkey's previous high. A Dec. 20 game against Connecticut at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville is the headliner. Coach Geno Auriemma's team is coming off a 38-1 season and its 17th Final Four appearance in the last 18 seasons.

LSU tips off the season on Nov. 2 by hosting Southeastern Louisiana to open a seven-game homestand. Game six will be against Fairleigh Dickinson, which will be the first of the five NCAA Tournament teams from last season on the schedule. The Knights (30-5) were a No. 15 seed.

The Lady Tigers then play Villanova (25-8, No. 10 tournament seed last season) and North Carolina State (21-11, No. 7 seed) in the Fort Myers (Florida) Tip-Off Thanksgiving Tournament on Nov. 27-28. They make it three-straight marquee matchups at North Carolina (28-8, No. 4) on Dec. 2 in the SEC/ACC Challenge.

There will not be the typical mystery surrounding the viability of Mulkey's squad as it enters SEC play on Dec. 31 at Auburn. At this point, Mulkey may know what she has more than in past seasons. UConn, UNC, Villanova and NC State will be a good early test for a team replacing two starters in the backcourt.

Guards Flau'jae Johnson and Jada Richard both departed for the WNBA and Ole Miss, respectively. Senior Mi-Laysia Fulwiley should slide into one of those vacancies after leading the team with 14.2 points per game off the bench last season, and the other will likely be filled by Iowa State transfer Jada Williams. Williams was named first-team All-Big 12 after averaging 15.3 points, 7.7 assists and 3.5 rebounds as the Cyclones' floor general last season.

*(continued next page)*



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They will join returning starter Mikaylah Williams in the back court, while the front court is led by a pair of returning contributors entering their second season at LSU - sophomore Grace Knox and junior Kate Koval.

### LSU Women Add Russian Center Anna Minaeva

LSU women's basketball coach Kim Mulkey announced the signing of 6-foot-5 Russian post player Anna Minaeva on Aug. 14, strengthening her post play with an all-around player who may impact the 2026-27 squad immediately.

"She has the experience, skill set, and size to make an immediate impact," Mulkey said. "It takes tremendous courage to leave home at just 17 and travel across the world to pursue a dream. I'm excited to support and guide Anna as she begins this next chapter at LSU."

Minaeva played in 29 games in 2025-26 in the Russia Premier League and Russia Super League, averaging 11.2 points and 9.6 rebounds.



Jere Hribar  
Photo by LSU Athletics

## Swimmers At European Aquatics Championships

Nine Tigers swam at the 2026 European Championships in August.

Senior Jere Hribar of Split, Croatia, helped lead Croatia's 4x100 freestyle relay squad to a bronze medal, clocking a time of 3:13.06. He also finished fifth in the 100 freestyle with a personal best time of 47.42. He also took 10th in the 50 freestyle (21.77) and 19th in the 50 butterfly (23.35).

Junior Volodymyr Lisovets set a Ukrainian national record in the 50 breast with a time of 26.84, sending him to the final. In the final, Lisovets improved his time to 26.78 to take fifth, but his record was lost to a Ukrainian teammate by six hundredths of a second.

Sophomore Martina Bukvic of Serbia took 36th in the 50 breast (32.22), 24th in the 100 breast (1:08.91), and 19th in the 200 breast (2:30.89). Her Serbian teammate, junior Nikola Simic placed 29th in the 400 freestyle (3:53.51) and posted personal bests, finishing 16th in both the 800 freestyle (7:58.27) and 1500 freestyle (15:15.72).

Junior Nina Stanisavljevic, also from Serbia, took 37th in the 50 freestyle (25.91), 29th in the 50 back stroke (28.96), 47th in the 50 butterfly (27.52), and 41st in the 100 butterfly with a personal best (1:00.55). **TR**



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CALENDAR SEPT 2026



**9/3**

HAPPY 79TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH  
**CURLEY HALLMAN**



**9/5**

HAPPY HEAVENLY BIRTHDAY TO  
FORMER LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH  
**PAUL DIETZEL**



**9/7**

HAPPY 75TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER  
**BERT JONES**



**9/9**

HAPPY 88TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
LSU FOOTBALL PLAYER  
**JOHNNY ROBINSON**



**9/15**

HAPPY 68TH BIRTHDAY TO LSU  
FOOTBALL OFFENSIVE ANALYST  
**STEVE ENSMINGER**



**9/17**

HAPPY 72ND BIRTHDAY TO FORMER  
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**JOHN BRADY**



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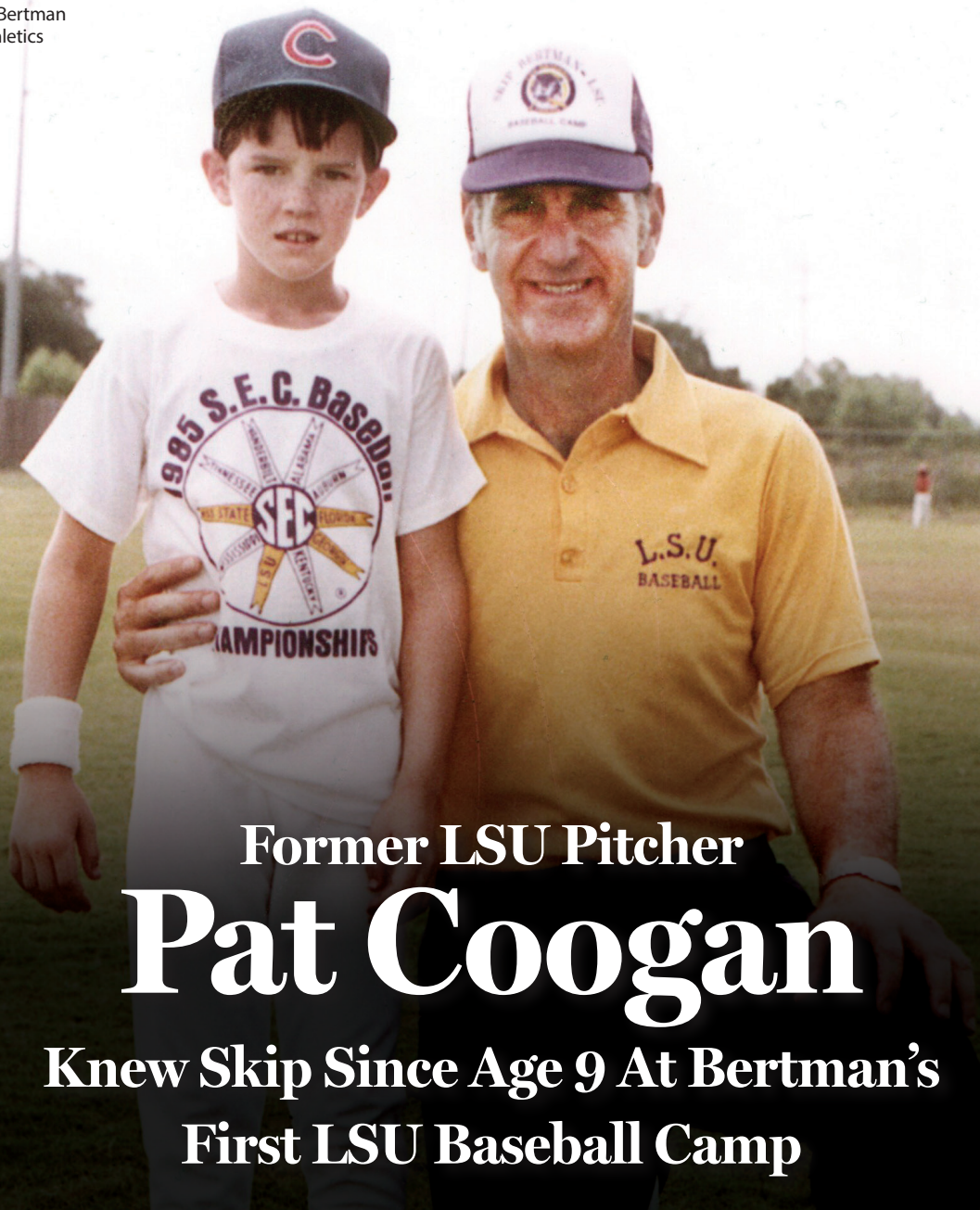
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Pat Coogan, Skip Bertman  
Photo by: LSU Athletics



## Former LSU Pitcher **Pat Coogan**

### Knew Skip Since Age 9 At Bertman's First LSU Baseball Camp

**W**hen Pat Coogan was 9 years old, he met LSU's new baseball coach at Skip Bertman's first camp before his first season in 1984.

Coogan's father was pediatrician Mike Coogan, a charter member of the Coaches Committee who

would become close with Bertman. Coogan develop into a top pitcher for Catholic High and signed with LSU before the 1995 season.

In three seasons, Coogan went 22-3, including the win in relief of LSU's 1996 national championship game, and he started the 1997 title

game. After his pro career, he graduated in business from LSU, became successful and moved within two blocks of Bertman in Riverbend near LSU. Their friendship grew, and Coogan saw him often before Bertman passed on Aug. 14 at age 88. Tiger Rag interviewed Coogan on Aug. 15.



**TIGER RAG:** What has been going through your mind?

**PAT COOGAN:** A lot. And mostly the really good things. There's some sadness that comes along with his passing, but he lived 88 great years and probably defied the odds by living that long with some health concerns the last couple years. We were fortunate to have him as long as we did. Honestly, flooded with emotions and stories and thoughts about my time with him - not only at LSU, but all these years after, being that he lived around the corner. Got to see him often, and interact as two guys, not player-coach. Although, he always did feel like a coach. Just a mountain of a man, and he had so much of an impact on me and my family for 42 years.

**TR:** What do you remember about any last conversations?

**COOGAN:** I was at the Louisiana ABC (Association of Building Contractors) Convention recently, and the keynote speaker, Jonathan Pixley (former Dunham High basketball coach), told us to think about someone who meant so much in your life and text that person. So, I texted Skip, "Coach, thanks for everything you've done for me and my teammates and what you continue to do for us."

The convention ended, and at about 1:30, he called. "I really appreciate you sending me that text. I don't know why you sent it, but thanks," he said. Probably talked for 20 minutes. That'll be the last time I'll speak with him, but it was good.

**TR:** What was it like being a Skip camper as a kid, then winning two national championships with him as a pitcher (1996, '97)?

**COOGAN:** I met Skip when I was 9, and my dad passed away nine years ago. So, the two most influential men in my life, I knew them for the exact amount of time - 42 years. I just thought that was incredible - the coincidence of that. We always went to

the games when I was a kid. He and my dad were truly friends. Skip's been in my life ever since 1984. There was never any lapse.

**TR:** Did he ever bring it up that you were a camper?

**COOGAN:** No. But he would call me Mike - my dad's name. He had trouble with names, but I think it was intentional to knock me down a rung

or two. That was part of the psychology he used on young guys. Not to belittle me, but to keep me in check.

**TR:** And he kept going to you in the biggest games.

**COOGAN:** I was mad at him for it. But it worked, because I said, "You know what? He's going to know what my name is." So, that motivated me. **TR**

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# EVERYTHING MATTERED

*Skip Bertman won 870 games and five national championships at LSU. Over the final years of his life, Tiger Rag had unusual access to the coach who built the program. What he talked about most was not what he had won, but how people and teams become something more than they were.*

By TODD HORNE, Tiger Rag Executive Editor

Skip Bertman coached baseball at LSU from 1984 through 2001. He won 870 games, took the Tigers to the College World Series 11 times and won five national championships. He later spent seven years as LSU's athletic director, where he hired four coaches who would win national championships at LSU in four different sports.

Quite simply, Skip Bertman won.

Yet when Bertman died in Baton Rouge on August 14 at 88, and the men who played for him, coached with him and worked alongside him began talking about his life, the championships were rarely where their memories stayed.

They talked about the teacher and mentor. The demanding coach who remained a friend decades later. The man who remembered his players after they were no longer players.

Those of us at Tiger Rag had been fortunate enough to see some of that ourselves.

Tiger Rag Editor Glenn Guilbeau spent extensive time reconstructing Bertman's life, methods and thinking for *Everything Matters in Baseball: The Skip Bertman Story*. Over the past four years, Glenn, I and Tiger Rag also enjoyed extraordinary access to Bertman himself.

He gave us hours.





Bertman talked about baseball, of course, but baseball with Skip was rarely just baseball. He talked about leadership and motivation, failure and confidence, Sandy and LSU, players and coaches and teams from decades ago. He could begin with a pitching change and somehow end up explaining human nature.

**And he never really stopped coaching.**

I learned that again in January 2023, when Bertman sat down with me at Mike Anderson's in Baton Rouge. We planned to talk for about an hour.

Four hours later, we were still there.

Jay Johnson had coached only one season at LSU. His first team went 40-22 and reached an NCAA Regional final

His second team had yet to play a game, although expectations were enormous.

I asked Bertman what he thought about where Johnson was taking the program.

"I'm real pleased with Jay," he told me. "In fact, I couldn't be more pleased with him."

Then he explained why.

"Whatever it takes, he figures it out."

LSU had a problem during Johnson's first season: pitching.

Johnson attacked it by hiring Wes Johnson away from the Minnesota Twins. Bertman had already gone down to the bullpen himself to watch LSU's pitchers work under their new coach.

"They can pitch," he told me.

Then he told me to watch what the new pitching coach would do to the team.

This was January. Paul Skenes had not thrown a pitch for LSU. Dylan Crews had not played his final college season. Omaha was still months away.

Bertman wasn't predicting a national championship.

What interested him was the construction.

A weakness had been identified. The coach attacked it. The players were responding. Bertman went down to see the work himself and recognized something.

**That was how his mind worked.**

"Whatever it takes, he figures it out" could just as easily have described Bertman.

When LSU lacked resources, he found them. When LSU baseball lacked a culture that expected Omaha, he talked about Omaha until the expectation became so deeply embedded that generations of LSU fans would eventually have difficulty imagining a time when it had not existed.

Bertman understood that champions are constructed long before anybody hands them a trophy.

In January 2023, he saw Johnson constructing one.

LSU eventually won the national championship.

## THE LONG SEASON

**Two years later, Bertman joined us for Tiger Rag's On Base With Skip Bertman podcast.**

LSU was preparing for a huge May 2025 series against Arkansas and was not swinging the bat particularly well. The Tigers were good. Everybody knew that. But their offensive struggles had become difficult to ignore.

I asked Bertman what he saw.

He did not pretend to have discovered some hidden mechanical flaw. Instead, he explained what decades of baseball had taught him about judging a team before the season was finished.

"My belief is that teams go up and down through a long baseball season," he said. "The pitching goes up and down. The hitting goes up and down."

He wasn't dismissing LSU's problem. He was putting it inside something larger.

**A season moves.**

His mind went back 25 years to the final national championship team he coached. LSU's 2000 team was excellent but imperfect. Then the postseason arrived and everything changed.

The Tigers went 13-0 through the SEC Tournament, NCAA Regional, Super Regional and College World Series.

*(continued next page)*



The champion, Bertman understood, is not necessarily the team that avoids every downturn. What matters is what the team becomes when the games become elimination games.

Then he started talking about Trey Hodges.

Hodges entered the 2000 season coming off surgery on his throwing arm. Early in the year, he struggled.

The results said one thing. Bertman believed something else.

"I knew Trey Hodges was an outstanding pitcher," he said.

He believed Hodges simply wasn't ready yet. So Bertman waited. He did not confuse the pitcher he was watching early in the season with the pitcher he believed might exist when his arm was healthy and the games mattered most.

Eventually Hodges began to emerge.

He became one of LSU's most important postseason pitchers and ultimately the Most Valuable Player of the College World Series.

Bertman had a word for what had happened.

### **Graduating.**

"You went to a higher level," he explained.

One great performance wasn't necessarily enough. Bertman wanted to see another.

He wanted evidence that the player had not merely experienced a great night but had become something different.

Sitting there in May 2025, he was watching another LSU pitcher for exactly that reason.

Anthony Eyanson had just thrown a complete game at Texas A&M, allowing three hits and one run while striking out 14. Bertman called it the best game an LSU pitcher had thrown all season.

But he wanted another one.

"If Anthony pitches well this weekend," Bertman said before the Arkansas series, "that would be an example of what I called graduating."

Eyanson went out against Arkansas and threw six scoreless innings with 11 strikeouts.

He had done it again.

Kade Anderson had already reached another level in Bertman's mind. Casan Evans was developing.

LSU's pitching staff was getting better.

Then Bertman said something that catches me differently now.

"Our pitching is coming on."

### **Our.**

Bertman had coached his final LSU game nearly a quarter-century earlier. Jay Johnson had his own program, his own players, his own coaches and his own methods. Bertman understood all of that.

But LSU baseball was still we.

When the conversation turned to how good Arkansas was, Bertman acknowledged it.

"But so are we."

### **Still we.**

Six weeks later, LSU won another national championship.

Bertman hadn't predicted that one, either.

He had seen it composing.

In 2023, he had recognized a coach building a champion by attacking a weakness. In 2025, he recognized players and a team becoming something more as a long season moved toward the games that mattered most.

Those conversations mean more to me now because they preserve Skip doing something he had done throughout his life: seeing not only what was in front of him, but what it might become.

**And that ability was never confined to baseball.**



## HIS BOYS

**When Bertman died, his former players rarely stayed with the championships for long.**

They talked about the man who coached them hard, remembered them decades later and remained part of their lives.

Doug Thompson said one of Bertman's greatest joys late in life was sitting with "his boys" and listening to their stories.

Bertman had told us essentially the same thing during our 2025 podcast. He had recently attended the 25th-anniversary reunion of his 2000 championship team and seen dozens of former players.

"It was just wonderful for me," he said.

Then he explained why.

**"I have a memory attached to every guy."**

That sentence says almost everything.

This was the coach who remembered Trey Hodges before Hodges became the College World Series MVP, who understood that the struggling player in front of him was not necessarily the finished player.

Decades later, he still remembered the individual young men who had occupied those uniforms.

Ray Wright remembered climbing aboard the team bus in Omaha after LSU had won a national championship.

Bertman was waiting.

"National Champion Ray Wright," his coach told him.

More than three decades later, Wright still remembers what those words felt like.

There is something wonderfully Bertman about that moment. LSU had just achieved the ultimate team accomplishment.

Bertman handed it back to the individual.

He had spent years teaching players to believe in the team, then made sure each understood what he had become inside it.

Bertman eventually did something similar with LSU baseball itself.

Before Paul Mainieri became LSU's coach, people warned him that Bertman had built the program so completely that he might never truly let go of it.

*(continued next page)*



Mainieri discovered the opposite.

Bertman encouraged him, advised him and gave him room to make LSU baseball his own.

Mainieri won the 2009 national championship.

Years later, Jay Johnson developed his own relationship with Bertman. Skip did not need Johnson to coach like him.

He wanted to understand what Johnson was building. He watched the pitchers. He studied the team.

He recognized when players were changing.

**And LSU remained “we.”**

That may be one of the most generous things a builder can do.

Bertman constructed LSU baseball so completely that his fingerprints remain everywhere, then understood that loving what he had built did not require possessing it forever.

It meant wanting the next man, and the next generation of his boys, to succeed.

## EVERYTHING MATTERED

**The institutional evidence of Skip Bertman’s life is everywhere.**

It is visible at Alex Box Stadium and on the field bearing his name. It is visible in championship banners and in generations of LSU fans who now consider Omaha an expectation.

It is visible in LSU’s 2023 and 2025 national championships.

Those championships belong to Jay Johnson and his players and coaches. Bertman would have understood that better than anyone.

But I keep thinking about those two conversations.

In January 2023, before Johnson had won anything at LSU, Bertman told me why he believed in him.

Johnson identified problems. He attacked them. He figured things out.



A few months later, LSU was national champion.

In May 2025, Bertman explained the long season. He talked about Hodges and “graduating.” He pointed toward pitchers he believed were becoming something more than they had been.

“Our pitching is coming on.”

“But so are we.”

Six weeks later, LSU was national champion again.

Skip Bertman did not predict either championship.

He saw them composing because he had spent a lifetime putting those pieces together himself.

And perhaps that explains why the men who played for him remembered the same man we had come to know.

He saw Hodges beyond the bad outings. He saw players beyond labels and roles. He saw Johnson beyond a first season that ended in a Regional. He saw Mainieri as the man who should own LSU baseball after him.

Years later, when the games no longer mattered at all, he still wanted to sit with his players and hear their stories.

**“I have a memory attached to every guy.”**

Glenn Guilbeau titled his biography *Everything Matters in Baseball*.

Skip Bertman spent a lifetime proving it.

The pitching coach mattered. The bullpen session mattered. The slump mattered, but so did understanding that it would not last forever. Waiting on Trey Hodges mattered. Recognizing when Anthony Eyanson had graduated mattered. The walk-on mattered. The player after his final game mattered.

**The 870 wins mattered.**

**The five national championships mattered.**

But when Skip Bertman was gone and the people whose lives he touched began telling us what they remembered, something else became unmistakable.

**They mattered to him.**

**And he mattered to them.**

**Everything mattered. TR**

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*Reporting note: Player, coach and staff remembrances were gathered by Hunt Palmer. Bertman quotations and observations from 2023 and 2025 are from Todd Horne/Tiger Rag interviews and the On Base With Skip Bertman podcast. Glenn Guilbeau is the author of *Everything Matters in Baseball: The Skip Bertman Story*.*



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Photo by: Michael Bacigalupi



# SKIP BERTMAN

**His 9 Innings May Be Up, But His Legacy  
Will Live Forever In Extra Innings**

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor





# Legendary Coach Played His Best 9, Not His 9 Best - Here Are 9 Of His Best Remembering Him At His Best

When top recruit target Blair Barbier of Brother Martin High in New Orleans visited LSU coach Skip Bertman in 1996 before he won his third national title, he asked if he would start or be red-shirted.

“Look, big guy, I play my best nine, not my nine best,” Bertman said. “And if you’re in that, you’ll play. If not, you won’t. I don’t plan to red-shirt you, but I might.”

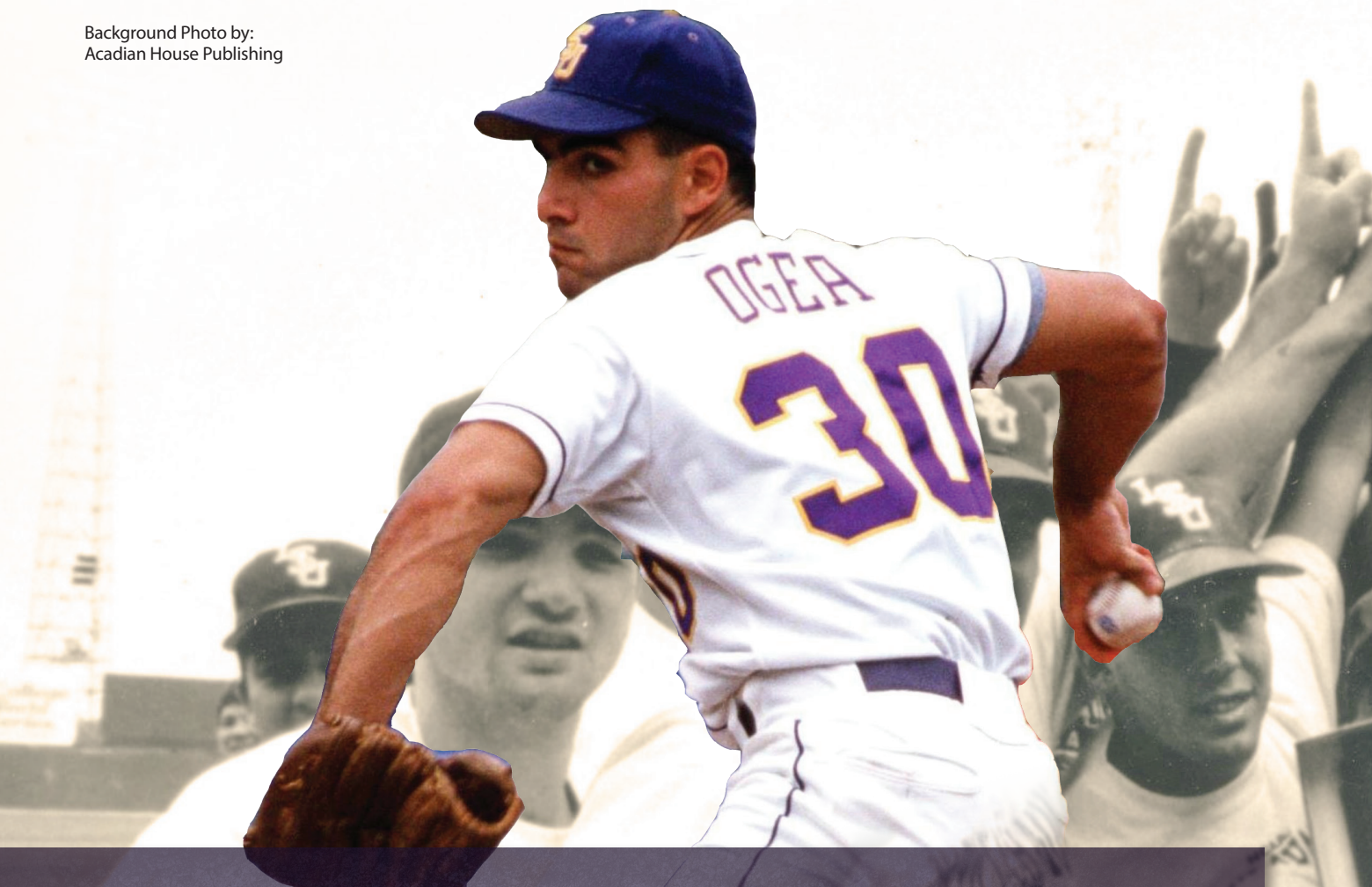
In other words, Bertman put his best team on the field, not necessarily his nine most talented players. Barbier was in both sets of nine and started at second base as a freshman in 1997 when LSU won its second straight national crown and fourth overall. Barbier started at third in 2000 when Bertman won his fifth and last title.

And he is one of Bertman’s “best nine” profiled here. But there were many more than nine in his five-time national championship LSU career from 1984-2001 that featured 11 trips to the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska. Bertman passed away at age 88 on Aug. 14.

“There are a lot of great players that I had, but they weren’t always competitive,” Bertman said in 2021. “That means a lot to me. Those guys – winning every pitch meant something to them. Everything mattered to them. Guys like Mike Sirotka (pitcher on 1991 and 1993 national championship teams), Chad Ogea (pitcher on 1991 national championship team), Brett Laxton (pitcher on 1993 national championship team) and Blair Barbier.”

And many others.





## 1ST INNING



### Chad Ogea

LSU Ace Chad Ogea Was An Extension Of Skip Bertman in 1990 and '91

The closest Skip Bertman came to actually being on the mound as a pitcher for the Tigers was when Chad Ogea was the ace at 14-2 in 1990 and at 14-5 in the first national championship season in 1991. There was also Mike Sirofka in '91 at 11-0.

Bertman admitted Ogea was one of his favorites because he did exactly what he was told. And Ogea basically had one pitch – a fastball. But he was the poster player for location.

“If you told him to throw it into a coffee can, he did it,” Bertman said.

Ogea swore by Bertman, who developed that pitch into a third round choice in the 1991 draft by Cleveland, where Ogea pitched for five seasons and won two games in the 1997 World Series loss to Florida.

“I was way ahead of a lot of guys in the minors,” Ogea said. “They wanted to throw it hard and hope for the best. Skip had me hitting spots, throwing in when I needed to, throwing away.”

The Lake Charles native got the win in the 6-3 victory over Wichita State in the national title game after a video session the night before with Bertman in his Embassy Suites office about what would matter.

“We watched Wichita State hitters for hours,” Ogea said. “Skip was like, ‘This guy does this. This guy does that.’ I remember him saying, ‘We’re going to win the game. You’ve been working towards this your whole college career.’”





## 2ND INNING



### Todd Walker

One Of LSU's Greatest Players, Todd Walker, Was Intimidated By Skip And His Large Cell Phone

When Todd Walker arrived at LSU in the fall of 1991 from Airline High in Bossier City after Skip Bertman's first national championship that previous summer, he was far from becoming the eighth pick of the first round by Minnesota and a member of the College Baseball Hall of Fame.

"It was the most intimidating situation I've ever been involved in," Walker said during Tiger Rag Radio's special edition on Bertman's life on Aug. 18. "Look, this guy was Caesar. This guy was bigger than life."

Through Walker's first few practices as the fourth team second baseman, he barely saw Bertman, who was busy speaking, raising money or getting something built.

"When you did see Skip, he had that big, vanilla cell phone that was the size of his head, and he had a big head," Walker said. "So, that was the visual I have. If he wasn't smoking a cigar, he had that phone nobody had, so he was rich."

And Walker could've been richer at Oklahoma State or Texas A&M with a full-ride scholarship as opposed to the 20 percent deal Bertman gave him.

Soon, Bertman was talking about Walker on his phone. He still holds the school record for career batting average at .396, had 52 home runs, hit .400 in 1992 and was the 1993 World Series MVP for the national champion Tigers with three homers and 12 RBIs.

"In three years, Skip became a father figure and one of my best friends," Walker said. "That's the person he was."

*(continued next page)*





## 3RD INNING



### Warren Morris

#### Is The Poster Child For How Skip Bertman Made Everything Matter

Warren Morris exemplified what LSU coach Skip Bertman preached and practiced daily – that everything matters baseball. This is why Morris was chosen to write the foreword for the “Everything Matters in Baseball” book about Bertman.

“I tell people today, as a player at LSU under coach Bertman, you received more than just an education in baseball. You got an education in life,” Morris wrote.

Morris was an undersized, lightly regarded infielder from Bolton High in Alexandria when he signed with LSU before the 1993 season and red-shirted. Three years later, he hit the most famous home run in college baseball history on June 8, 1996, with two outs in the bottom of the ninth with a man on and LSU down one for a 9-8, national title win over Miami.

“I learned a lot that first year,” Morris wrote. “Everything we did had a purpose and a reason behind it. There was attention to detail to everything we did.”

Morris learned that before you pick up a bat under Bertman, you pick up a broom or a mop. His job as a freshman cleaning the coaches’ offices. Other players cleaned the opponents’ locker room and dugout.

“Even something as menial as this contributed to our success,” Morris wrote. “If things were in disarray, it gave the sense this program was not in very good order. That would build confidence in the opponent. We wanted whatever edge we could get. Everything mattered.”





## 4TH INNING



### Rick Greene

The “Hold The Rope” Story  
Was No Fairy Tale –  
It Came True For  
National Title No. 1

First, LSU ace Chad Ogea limited Wichita State to four hits and three earned runs and left the 1991 national championship game in the eighth with a 6-3 lead. Then he delivered a quote like in the movies as he handed the ball to closer Rick Greene – the nation’s saves leader with 13 who would go in the first round to Detroit a year later.

“Hold the rope,” Ogea said in Greene’s ear.

“Hold The Rope” was a favorite fable of Bertman’s and became the title of the SEC Storied documentary on him that would premiered 30 years later on ESPN. Bertman would ask each of his Tigers what teammate they wanted holding the other end of a rope if they were hanging from a cliff.

Each player would pick a player or two, but they were all wrong.

“You’re not a team until you believe any teammate can hold the rope,” Bertman finally told his grasshoppers.

“Skip told that early in the year, but it wasn’t in my mind,” Greene said. “But when Chad whispered, ‘Hold the rope,’ it clicked. And I thought, ‘OK, it’s my turn to be the guy on the cliff holding the rope for the next guy. This is my time.’ It was amazing because it broke my anxiety.”

Greene shut down Wichita State over two innings on one hit with two strikeouts and a grounder to Chris Mook at third to end it for his 14th save and Bertman’s first national championship.

“The guy was so full of wisdom,” Greene said. “You would just sit there and listen.”

*(continued next page)*



## 5TH INNING



### Doug Thompson

Saw Skip's Soft Side And His Coaching Beast Mode –  
When Everything Really Mattered

In Skip Bertman's final months and weeks, neighbor and former pitcher Doug Thompson saw a lot of him. He drove him to appointments, to games and to lunch at his favorite spot – Mike Anderson's near his home.

"I would hear from people all the time, 'Oh, we met coach Bertman. He's such a sweet man. It had to be so much fun to play for him,'" Thompson said. "And it was the most fun time of my life. But a sweet man?"

Not when he was in beast mode, said Thompson, who was 12-3 and 12-4 in the 1997 and '98 seasons at LSU. Thompson struck out seven and walked one through the final four and two-thirds innings for the win over Alabama, 13-6, in the 1997 national title game.

"He was trying to do one thing – win," Thompson said. "And everything mattered. Skip was the most competitive coach. The man wanted to win. It was his job. It's all he thought about while in coaching mode. What other detail could he focus on to help us win? What could he say? Who could he get to speak to us. What video would get us fired up? All of that mattered to him so much."

It was all about preparation with Bertman to the last detail.

"He was way ahead of everyone at using data," Thompson said in 2021. "Rarely would he make gut decisions. If Skip had access to the data of today through computers, he would be winning championships still."



## 6TH INNING



### Pat Coogan

**Was LSU's Ace In 1997,  
Because Skip Made Him  
Believe He Was**

Of all LSU's baseball players from 1984-2001 under coach Skip Bertman, pitcher Pat Coogan of Catholic High probably knew Bertman longer than anyone. At age 9, Coogan went to Bertman's first baseball camp for kids before Bertman's first season.

Coogan's dad, pediatrician Mike Coogan, was on Bertman's first Coaches Committee and the two became close. Coogan signed with LSU before the 1995 season and became one of Bertman's best aces, going 14-3 in 1997 and 22-3 in his career.

His favorite mound meeting with Bertman was when he relieved in the bottom of the seventh just after Long Beach State took a 7-6 lead on a three-run homer in an NCAA Regional elimination game in 1997 after South Alabama had upset LSU, 11-5. Coogan silenced the Dirtbags for four shutout innings with no hits for a 14-7 win in 11 innings. And LSU went on to win its fourth national title in Omaha.

"Afterwards, Skip gave me the biggest hug ever and said, 'You saved our ass.'"

But Bertman knew he could do it.

"He was always instilling confidence in us," Coogan said just after Bertman died. "He made us remember that you have these abilities, even when you don't believe it yourself. That was so helpful, because there are times in our lives where we doubt ourselves. Skip had that unique ability to draw that extra out of somebody and get them to picture themselves starring in their own movie."

## 7TH INNING



### Blair Barbier

**With Everything On The  
Line In 2000 And Time  
Running Out, Blair Barbier  
Showed It Mattered**

A sign of great coaches is not having to do it every time. Their team leaders take ownership.

Never was that more true of a Skip Bertman team than on June 17, 2000, with Stanford leading LSU, 5-2, in the national championship game before LSU's at-bat in the bottom of the eighth.

And senior Blair Barbier, a quarterback at Brother Martin High in New Orleans, huddled everyone up.

"I couldn't take it anymore," Barbier said.

"I didn't want to be the first team that lost a championship game under Skip. 'I laid into them. 'We're playing for the (expletive deleted) national championship!'"

After one out, Barbier was up. He fouled off six pitches – five down the left field line – before the eighth pitch. It was 2-and-2 when he launched a Justin Wayne changeup over left field, and it was 5-3. Jeremy Witten soon followed with a two-run homer to tie it 5-5. And LSU won it in the ninth, 6-5, on a walk-off RBI single by Brad Cresse, scoring Ryan Theriot from second for Bertman's fifth and final title.

Two decades after he retired in 2001, Bertman looked back.

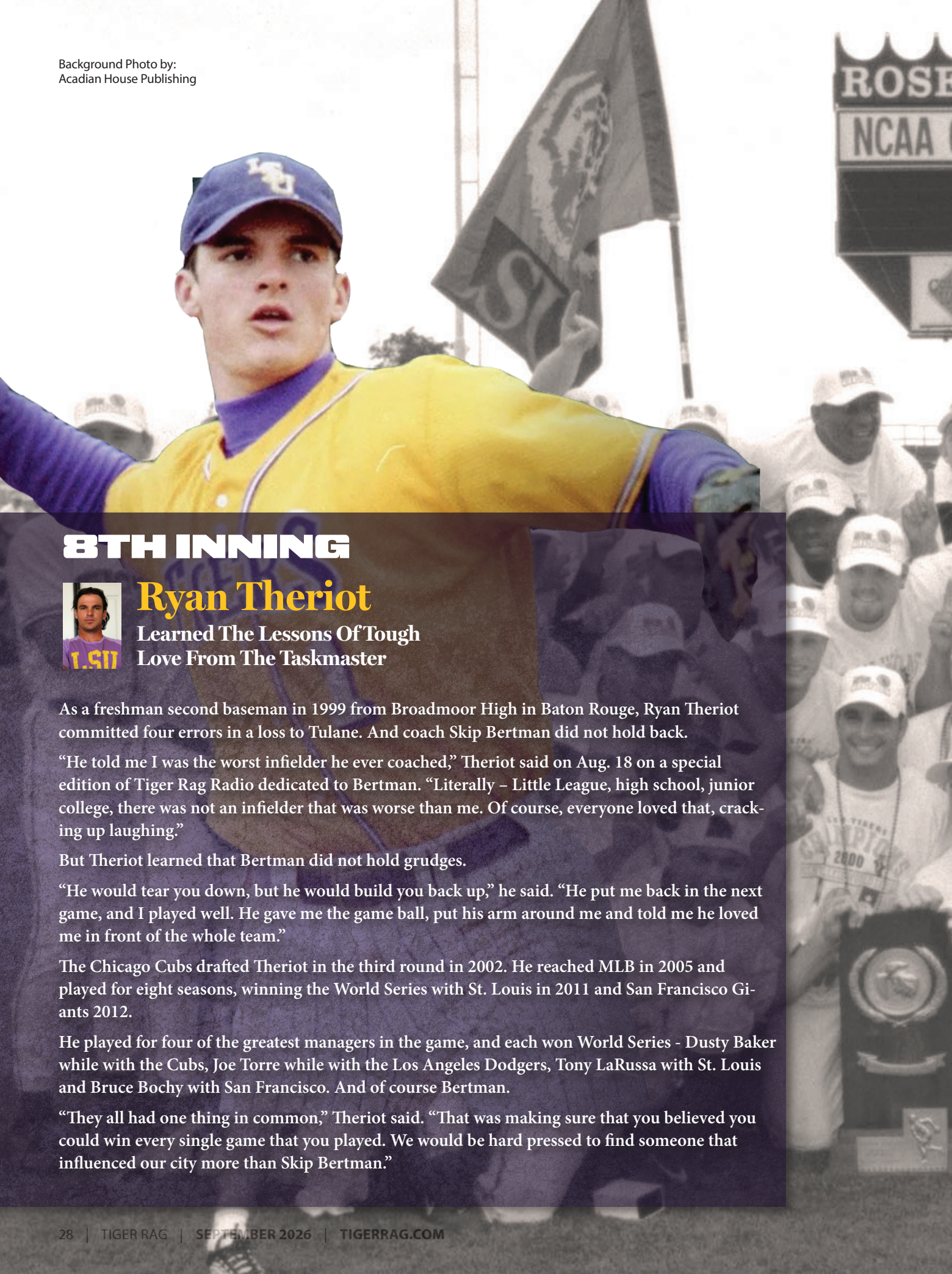
"There were a lot of great players, but they weren't always competitive," he said. "That kind of stuff means a lot to me. But some guys – winning every pitch meant something to them."

He brought up Barbier.

"Every pitch meant something to Barbier," Bertman said. "Every at-bat meant something. He didn't give any away."

Particularly the last one of his LSU career.





## 8TH INNING



### Ryan Theriot

Learned The Lessons Of Tough  
Love From The Taskmaster

As a freshman second baseman in 1999 from Broadmoor High in Baton Rouge, Ryan Theriot committed four errors in a loss to Tulane. And coach Skip Bertman did not hold back.

“He told me I was the worst infielder he ever coached,” Theriot said on Aug. 18 on a special edition of Tiger Rag Radio dedicated to Bertman. “Literally – Little League, high school, junior college, there was not an infielder that was worse than me. Of course, everyone loved that, cracking up laughing.”

But Theriot learned that Bertman did not hold grudges.

“He would tear you down, but he would build you back up,” he said. “He put me back in the next game, and I played well. He gave me the game ball, put his arm around me and told me he loved me in front of the whole team.”

The Chicago Cubs drafted Theriot in the third round in 2002. He reached MLB in 2005 and played for eight seasons, winning the World Series with St. Louis in 2011 and San Francisco Giants 2012.

He played for four of the greatest managers in the game, and each won World Series - Dusty Baker while with the Cubs, Joe Torre while with the Los Angeles Dodgers, Tony LaRussa with St. Louis and Bruce Bochy with San Francisco. And of course Bertman.

“They all had one thing in common,” Theriot said. “That was making sure that you believed you could win every single game that you played. We would be hard pressed to find someone that influenced our city more than Skip Bertman.”





## 9TH INNING



### Ben McDonald

Rushed To Skip Bertman's Side "In Bottom Of The Ninth"

Ben McDonald, one of LSU's greatest pitchers under Skip Bertman, had just called a game when he got the call. McDonald, the Golden Spikes Award winner at LSU in 1989 and first pick of the MLB Draft, had just arrived at his home near Baton Rouge on Thursday, Aug. 13, at about 8:30 p.m. for a weekend off from the Baltimore Orioles Radio Network after calling a game on Wednesday.

And the phone rang. It was LSU baseball coach Jay Johnson, who said Bertman was hospitalized. And it didn't look good.

"I drove about an hour to Baton Rouge," McDonald said the next day on the Paul Finebaum Show.

"I've got to see coach," McDonald told one of Bertman's daughters. "I have to."

Bertman signed McDonald from Denham Springs High near Baton Rouge before the 1987 season. McDonald was 27-11 in 1988 and '89 and set the SEC strikeout season record in 1989 with 202 that stood until LSU's Paul Skenes fanned 209 in 2023.

"I spent about three minutes with him. Told him I loved him and appreciated everything. He looked at me and said, 'It's the bottom of the ninth.' I said I know it is, but you've won a lot of games in the bottom of the ninth. And that's how I left it. Three hours later, he was gone," McDonald said, choking up.

"It's a really tough day, but what a legacy, man," McDonald said. "Coach's legacy will always be undefeated in my book. He didn't have a weak spot. He was just the best there was."





# Unchanged By History

Warren Morris' Walk-Off Carried Him All The Way To  
The Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame - But It Never Changed Him

By JOHN MARCASE, Louisiana Sports Writers Association

**T**hirty years after hitting the biggest home run in college baseball history, LSU's Warren Morris is still amazed at the impact.

"I had no clue that it was going to be something where strangers would come up to me all

the time and tell me, 'I remember where I was. I was doing this. Or, you know, I was at

this wedding,'" Morris said. "It's like a moment in time that people remember where they were."

Where they were was the championship game of the College World Series on June 8, 1996. LSU trailed Miami, 8-7, with two outs in the bottom of the ninth with the tying run on second base. Morris, batting last due to a broken hamate bone in his wrist and

subsequent surgery, had not hit a home run that season.

And then.

Morris attacked the first pitch from Miami closer Robbie Morrison. The line drive sailed just over the right field wall.

His life changed with that one swing.

But, as anyone who has known Morris before he stepped into the left-handed batter's



box at Rosenblatt Stadium for the final time as a collegian that day, will attest, that one swing did not change him.

“Warren Morris was a great kid before he hit that home run,” said Steve Boniol, Morris’ first baseball coach in a Dixie Youth League in Alexandria. “And Warren Morris would’ve been the same had he struck out. He has not changed.”

That is one of the reasons Morris was recognized as the third recipient of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame’s Louisiana Sports Ambassador Award in Natchitoches last June 27. The award honors exemplary contributions to the perception of Louisiana by an individual who has ties to the state’s sports landscape.

“The only thing Warren ever did wrong was return a videotape to Blockbuster without rewinding it,” joked Skip Bertman for a 20-year anniversary of Morris’ walk-off in 2016. “This happened not once, but twice when Warren was at LSU - a clergyman told me thanks for sending Warren by our church. And I didn’t send him. He went on his own both times. He’s a humble kid, a wonderful kid.”

And Morris homered again in his acceptance speech in Natchitoches.

“Skip used to tell us you can’t be afraid to fail. All I can do is the best I can do. I’m going to be aggressive. That’s why I hit the first pitch,” Morris said.

Less than two months later, Bertman passed away at age 88 on Aug. 14.

“If there’s one word to describe Skip Bertman, winner is a good way to sum it up,” Morris told Ray Partsch III three days later on 103.7 FM in Lafayette. “I mean everything he did mattered. He just knew how to prepare people. As athletic director, it wasn’t easy to raise football ticket prices, but that had to be done to reach the next level.”

Morris credits Bertman, a 2002 inductee into the Louisiana Sports Hall, for the popularity of college baseball now.

“His legacy goes across the country,” he said. “There were few games on television in the ‘80s when he got to LSU. Now it’s a huge draw.”

Morris was drafted in the fifth round in 1996 by Texas, soon traded to Pittsburgh before reaching the Big Leagues in just three years, and played for five seasons. Af-

ter retirement, he became vice-president of Red River Bank in Alexandria and is raising three daughters with his wife Julie.

“Warren embodies everything you want a citizen to be with work ethic, integrity and compassion,” LSU baseball sports information director Bill Franques said.

“He is Warren Morris,” Boniol said. “He never changed. I credit to his mom and dad. He is top notch, and there are not too many like him walking around.”

With a walk-off for the ages in his back pocket and forever connected to Bertman.

“We’ll miss him, but his legacy will live on,” said Morris, who wrote the foreword for “Everything Matters In Baseball,” the Bertman biography.

While signing copies of the book at Spirits in Alexandria last June, Morris noticed the line for the more expensive books previously signed by Bertman kept getting longer.

“I think they’re here for his autograph more than me,” Morris said. “He’s not even here, and he drew a crowd.” TR

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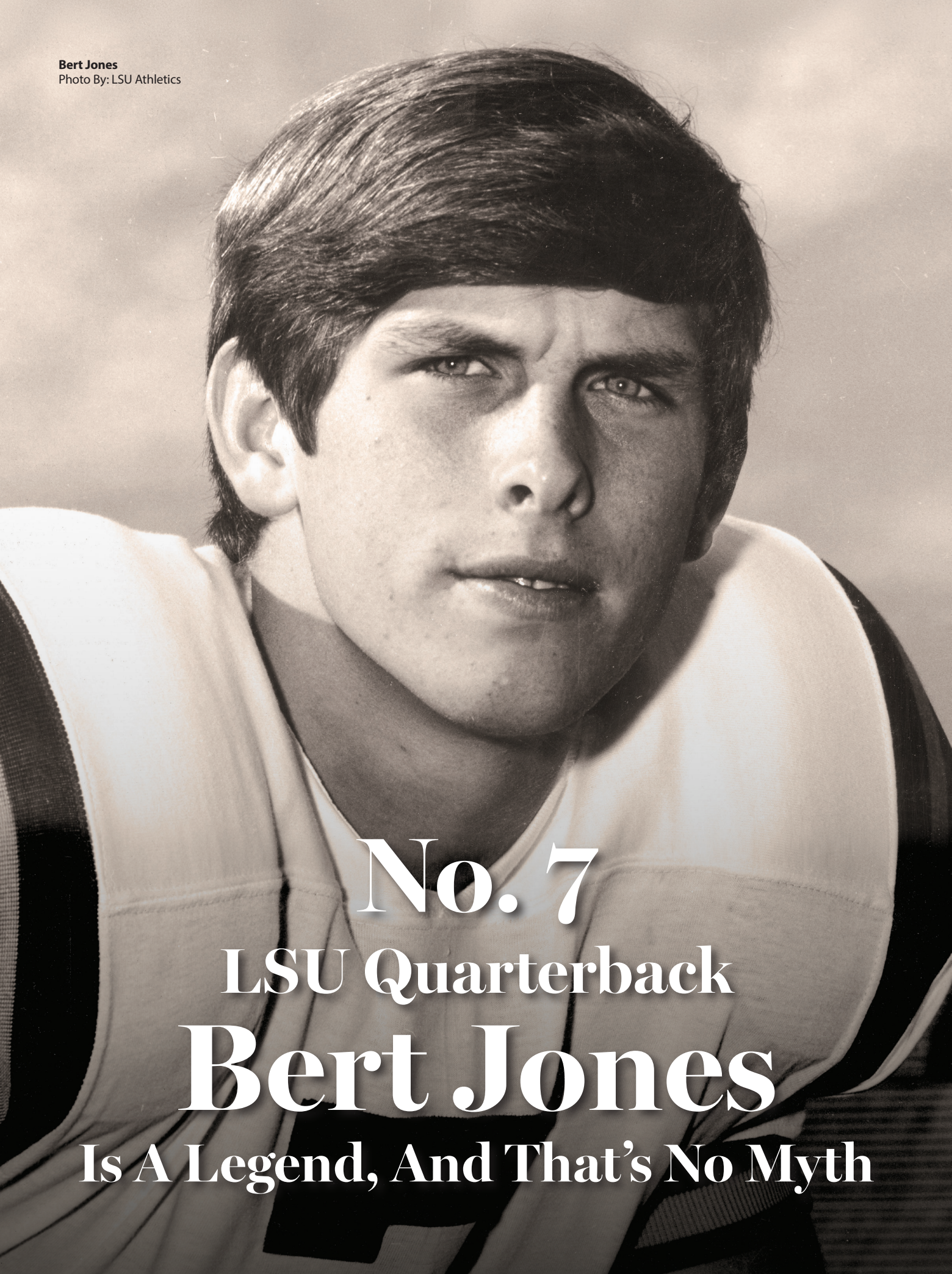
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A black and white portrait of a young man, Bert Jones, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He has dark, wavy hair and is wearing a light-colored jersey with dark shoulder accents. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

**Bert Jones**  
Photo By: LSU Athletics

**No. 7**

**LSU Quarterback**

**Bert Jones**

**Is A Legend, And That's No Myth**



# The “Ruston Rifle” Fired The Football 100 Yards In Tiger Stadium, And A “Quick Release” Got That “Last-Second” Win Over Ole Miss

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

LSU quarterback great Bert Jones, the first All-America quarterback in LSU history in 1972 and the Tigers’ last NFL MVP in 1976, will have his No. 7 jersey ceremoniously retired at Tiger Stadium on Nov. 14 when the Tigers host Texas.

It will be an historic night in more ways than one.

The bionic-armed Jones, nicknamed the “Ruston Rifle” for his hometown and high school, was one of the most talented quarterbacks to play at LSU and one of its most successful in the NFL. Texas has not played at LSU since a 20-7 loss on Sept. 19, 1953.

And another Manning will play at Tiger Stadium in Longhorns’ quarterback Arch Manning, grandson of Jones’ buddy and legendary Ole Miss QB Archie Manning. As a sophomore on Dec. 5, 1970, Jones threw two touchdown passes in a 61-17 win over the Rebels and Manning, who played with a cast on a broken arm, as the Tigers clinched coach Charles McClendon’s only Southeastern Conference championship.

The LSU Athletic Hall of Fame Committee unanimously approved Jones’

jersey retirement over the summer. His No. 7 will join running back and 1959 Heisman Trophy winner Billy Cannon’s No. 20, defensive back Tommy Casanova’s No. 37, running back/kick returner Jerry Stovall’s No. 21 and running back Charles Alexander’s No. 4 as retired jerseys in the LSU football program and in the stadium.

All retired jersey numbers are displayed on the façade in the south end zone of Tiger Stadium. Only Cannon’s No. 20 is no longer worn by LSU players. The other numbers are ceremoniously retired only.

“I had no idea that there was anything in the works, so this is totally unexpected,” Jones said. “I have been the beneficiary of a lot of good things and received a lot of accolades and a lot of awards, but this is at the top of the list. To have my number hung up in Tiger Stadium, where my father played, where my brother played and cousin played, is special.”

Jones’ father was William “Dub” Jones, who played halfback for the Tigers in 1942 and went on to win three NFL championships with the Cleveland

Browns in 1950, ’54 and ’55 as a back and another in 1964 as an offensive assistant coach. He passed away in 2024 at age 99.

Jones’ younger brother Ben Jones was a wide receiver at LSU from 1972-74, and his cousin Andy Hamilton played from 1969-71 as a wide receiver and was All-SEC in 1971.

“And what’s even equally as special is that I will be up there with my LSU roommate Tommy Casanova,” Jones said.

Casanova, a cornerback, running back and kick returner who returned two punts for touchdowns in that 61-17 win over Ole Miss, is LSU’s only three-time All-American (1969-71), had his jersey retired in 2009.

“This is really a big deal in my mind,” Jones said. “There is nothing greater. And I’ve had a lot of good things happen to me. Some of them were part of my doing, but most of them were because of my surrounding cast of supporters. But this is the top of the ladder. Just being in the ring of honor with those great players. This is as big as it gets in my world.”

*(continued next page)*



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Bert Jones

Photo By: LSU Athletics



## BERT JONES' RECORD BREAKING LSU CAREER

Jones compiled a record of 26-6-1 from 1970-72 as LSU's quarterback, leading the program to three bowl games and the 1970 SEC title. During his three seasons at LSU, the Tigers won nine games each year.

He capped his career as the school's record holder at the time for passing yards (3,255), touchdown passes (28), attempts (418) and completions (220). In 1972, Jones became the first quarterback in LSU history to top the 3,000-yard mark for passing yards in a career.

Jones also set the school mark for passing yards in a game (242 vs. Alabama in 1972) and passing yards in a season (1,464 in 1972). His 14 passing TDs in 1972 was a school record, and he became only the sixth player in program history to pass for three touchdowns in a game, doing it three times – against Auburn and Texas A&M in 1972 and Tulane in 1971.

After directing the Tigers to a 9-2-1 mark in 1972, Jones became the first player in LSU history to earn first team All-America honors as a quarterback. He went on to finish fourth in the Heisman Trophy voting that year and

was named the National Player of the Year in by The Sporting News.

Jones earned first-team All-SEC honors as a senior that season after leading the league in completion percentage (51.8), touchdown passes (14), total yards (1,464) and TDs responsible for (18) as LSU finished the year at 9-2-1.

"We always felt we had a chance to win when Bert was in there," said LSU running back Brad Davis, who played with Jones in 1972 and was All-SEC in 1973 and '74. "He always believed we could pull it out."



## THE NIGHT THE TIGER STADIUM CLOCK STOOD STILL

Jones did just that on Nov. 4, 1972, in Tiger Stadium when he found Davis in the corner of the end zone for a 10-yard touchdown and 16-16 tie against Ole Miss after time had elapsed just after the snap. Rusty Jackson kicked the extra point for the 17-16 win.

But the story of the game was the previous play. With :04 remaining and LSU at the Ole Miss 10-yard line, Jones threw incomplete over the middle into the end zone in what most believe surely took four seconds. But somehow, LSU benefited from a slow sleight of hand on the clock as :01 still flickered on the scoreboard after the incompletion. And Jones had one more play.

"It only reinforces the fact that I had a really quick release," Jones cracked. "You've got to have a quick release to be able to throw two passes in four seconds."

And it was not one of the strong-armed Jones more beautiful passes. The Ruston Rifle usually threw tight, hard spirals for miles.

"I threw a terrible pass," Jones said. "I didn't realize it until I saw a replay. And I have no idea why. But it gave Brad a great opportunity to catch it. All he had to do was grab one end, because it was an end-over-end pass. I was trying to make it easy for him."

Davis had his choice of ends of the ball to catch.

"It looked like Bert had kicked the ball to me instead of throwing it," Davis said. "It looked like a wounded duck. Then I lost it in the lights for a second. But it hit me right in the right hand. I just felt it and grabbed it. I didn't have much room. I had run right to the flag. I was trying to get across the line. It was a bam-bam play. No time to think about anything. And as soon as I got a hand on it, the safety hit me. Then I fell across the flag. I just got my shoulder pad inside it."

After Jackson's conversion, No. 6 LSU stayed undefeated at 7-0 going into its huge tilt at No. 2 Alabama in Birmingham the next week on ABC (won 35-21 by Bama). Unranked Ole Miss dropped to 4-4.

All clock cooking aside, Jones did take LSU 80 yards in 3:02 on the game-winning drive. 3:02, and some change, you might say.

"There's no way that next to last play could have taken only three seconds," Ole Miss safety Harry Harrison told Parrish Alford of the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal in 2022. "We were convinced we'd won the football game."

Rumors soon began swirling from angry Ole Miss fans that the clock operator was related to Jones.

"It was only a second or third cousin," Jones joked. "Not really a relative."

*(continued next page)*

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## TIGER STADIUM SUSPECT CLOCK OPERATOR LOCATED

The clock operator that infamous night was not a Jones. His name was Jim Campbell, and he served as an SEC official and clock operator in the 1960s and '70s. Baton Rouge Advocate writers Scott Rabalais and myself at the time happened to find him and interviewed him before LSU's game against Houston of Conference USA on Nov. 13, 1999, in the Tiger Stadium press box. Campbell was working as the supervisor of officials for C-USA at the time.

"There's an old proverb. Let sleeping dogs like," Campbell said when asked about the 1972 LSU-Ole Miss game. Campbell had been bombarded with calls from angry Ole Miss games after that game.

The Ole Miss press guide the next year printed the score from the game, "Ole Miss 16, LSU 10 ... + 7."

It remains one of the most remembered Tiger Stadium games in history.

And the call of the final play by Ferguson after he thought he had just called the final play remains a classic:

### JOHN FERGUSON'S FAMOUS CALL

"Here it is, the game over," Ferguson said as Jones took the final snap with the horn sounding immediately. "Jones back to throw, looking for a receiver. He has Davis. It is ... SCORE! TOUCHDOWN on the last play of the game. Brad Davis catches a Bert Jones pass in the corner of the end zone!"

Ferguson sounded as shocked as an Ole Miss fan may have.

"The game is tied 16-16," Ferguson said, but you can barely hear him from the crowd noise as 70,502 strong were in the stadium for the 8 p.m. kickoff and remained.

"Almost the entire Tigers' bench has spilled onto the field in the excitement," Ferguson said. "And so, we'll have the point after by Rusty Jackson. The game is over, and the score is tied 16-16."

Ferguson repeated the score as if still in disbelief.

"Rusty Jackson is in the game to try and make it a 17-16 game," he said. "Paul Lyons will hold. And the game rides on this kick now. Here is the extra point. Jackson boots it! TIGERS WIN, 17-16. And pandemonium breaks loose at Tiger Stadium!"

Paul Manasseh, LSU's sports information director extraordinaire that night, met McClendon on the field after the game with the perfect one-liner.

"Mac, if you had any guts, you would've gone for two," Manasseh said.

"Honestly," Jones said years later. "I did think it was over."

*(continued next page)*



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## ON TO THE NFL AND THE BALTIMORE COLTS

Jones went on to be selected No. 2 overall in the 1973 NFL Draft by the Baltimore Colts. During his 10-year NFL career, Jones appeared in 102 games with 96 starts. He led the Colts to three straight AFC East titles and the playoffs with records of 10-4, 11-3 and 10-4 from 1975-77.

A neck injury forced Jones to retire from the NFL following the 1982 season after passing for 18,190 yards and 124 touchdowns in a career that spanned nine years with the Colts and his last season in 1983 with the Los Angeles Rams. He also rushed for 1,429 yards and 14 touchdowns in his NFL career.

Jones graduated from LSU with a degree in business administration in 1983 just as his NFL career was ending. He later served as an outdoors show host on ESPN for 10 years, and he is a former chairman of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. He has remained active in fundraising for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation with his annual golf tournament as well as the Boys Scouts of America.

The Jones legend continues to thrive more than half a century after his last game at LSU in the 1972 season.

Just recently on the statewide "Talk Louisiana" radio show hosted by Tiger Rag president Jim Engster, one of Jones' exploits as a Tiger came to light as the "Ruston Rifle" was truly that.

While an LSU student, Jones on occasion would go out to an empty Tiger Stadium with friends, fraternity brothers and teammates to "toss" the football around.

"Yes, I could throw it 100 yards," Jones answered when Engster asked him if the legend was true. "Multiple times on multiple bets."

Engster had previously confirmed the 100-yard passes via eyewitnesses who were LSU teammates of Jones at the time – running back Al Coffee, wide receiver Ben Jones, who is Bert's younger brother, and kicker Mark Lumpkin. They told Engster that Jones threw it from one goal line past the other and into the end zone of Tiger Stadium.

"Yeah, that was at an intramural throwing contest," Jones said. "I went out and did that, and I think it was 106 or 107 yards. And so, yes, I set the record."

Tiger Stadium is known for myths and legends, but no other LSU quarterback has thrown it out of the stadium.

And Jones is one of only three Associated Press NFL MVPs from LSU in history - running back Jim Taylor of the Green Bay Packers in 1962 and quarterback Y.A. Tittle of the New York Giants in 1963.

"I can say I was the best in the business at the time I was there," Jones said. "It is what it is. It was a lot of fun."

Especially heaving it 100 yards.

Uh, make that 107. **TR**



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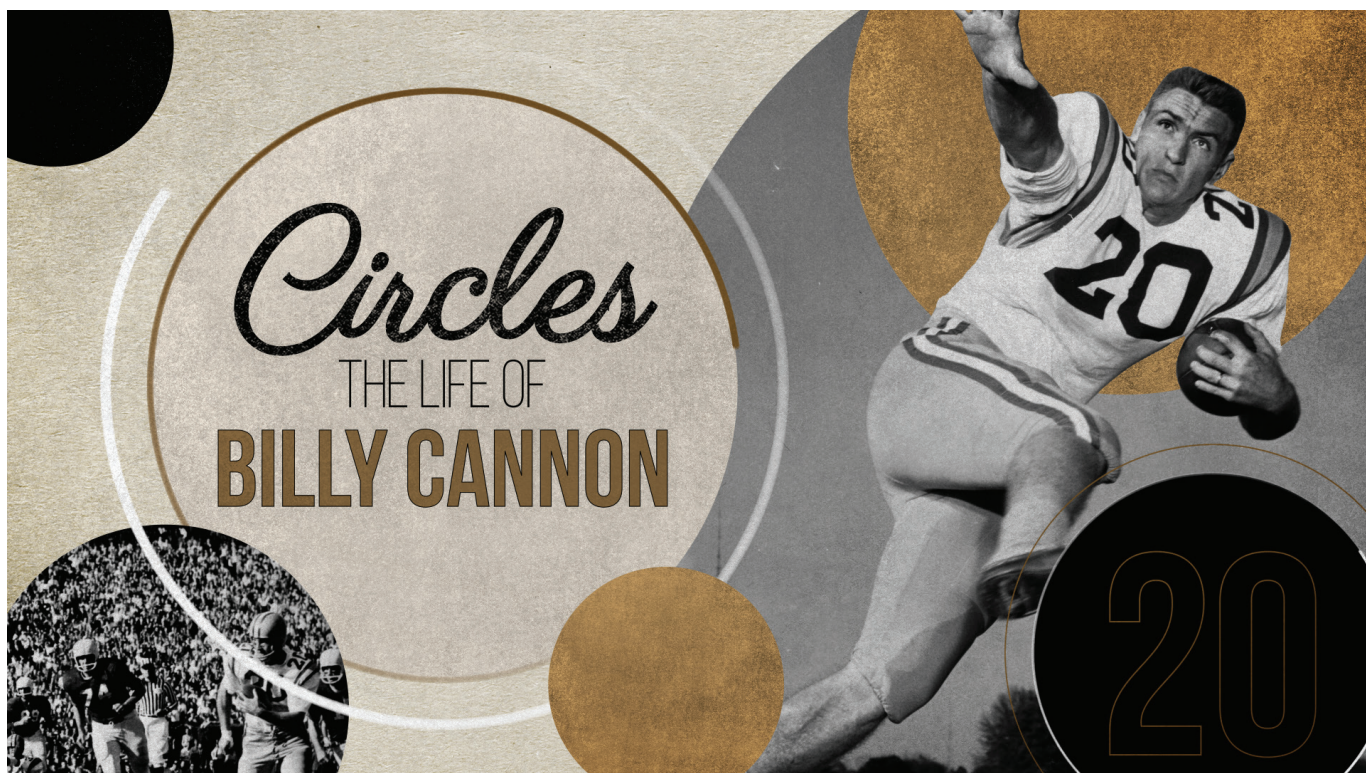
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# “Circles” Documentary Chronicles Circuitous Life Of Highs, Lows And Redemption Of LSU Great Billy Cannon

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

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One of the most anticipated games in the history of the storied LSU-Ole Miss football rivalry will play out on Saturday, Sept. 19, on ABC (6:30 p.m.) from Vaught-Hemingway Stadium in Oxford, Mississippi.

New LSU coach Lane Kiffin will return to the site of his previous job as coach of Ole Miss as that state's Public Enemy No. 1.

It remains to be seen, though, if that game will be as good as a documentary also dramatically intertwined between LSU and Ole Miss that will premier five nights before that Crusades kick-off on Monday, Sept. 14, at 7 p.m. on Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) statewide.

"Circles: The Life Of Billy Cannon" is sure to keep LSU and Ole Miss fans and all football fans and history buffs securely in their seats. Cannon, LSU's first Heisman Trophy winner in 1959 who was born in 1937 in Philadelphia, Mississippi, remains the matinee idol of LSU.

Cannon, who passed away on May 20, 2018, returned a punt 89 yards for a touchdown in the fourth quarter to give the No. 1 and defending national champion Tigers a 7-3 victory over No. 3 Ole Miss on Halloween Night, 1959. The loss ruined one of Ole Miss' greatest seasons.

"Any sports fan is going to enjoy the videos that they've never seen before of Billy," co-executive producer Jay Dardenne told Tiger Rag.

Dardenne, the former Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State of Louisiana, is finishing the documentary. He previously produced "Why Louisiana Ain't Mississippi" on LPB in 2022.

Linda Midgett, an Emmy Award winning producer, is co-producing the fascinating documentary with Dardenne.

"There is so much that people haven't seen in this show," Dardenne said.

Such as film of Cannon playing at Istrouma High in Baton Rouge, where his family moved when he was young.

"Some of the behind-the-scenes discussions and listening to Billy's teammates talk about the 1958-59 seasons are special," Dardenne, 72 and a LSU and Baton Rouge High graduate, said. "The casual observer who may not be a football fan will really enjoy the redemption story, which is really what it is."

Cannon was the first player picked in the first round of the 1960 NFL Draft by the Los Angeles Rams, but had secretly signed a \$100,000 deal with the AFL Houston Oilers and played there for four seasons. He was the AFL MVP in 1960 and 61 as the Oilers won the AFL title both seasons. He played with the Oakland Raiders from 1964-69, winning another AFL title in 1967 and played in the Super Bowl II loss to Green Bay. He played in 1970 for Kansas City before retiring.

Cannon became a dentist in Baton Rouge and was very successful in various businesses before he was arrested for his involvement in a major counterfeiting ring in 1983. He served more than two years in federal prison in Texarkana, Texas, before his release in 1986. Cannon returned to his dentistry career in Baton Rouge.

Later in life, he became the dentist at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola and helped prisoners for years before passing away.

"Why and how Billy became involved in counterfeiting is a major part of the documentary and how he came back from all of that," Dardenne said. "Billy said that his life was circular."

This is where the title of the documentary originated.

"He said his mind worked in circles, and sometimes that criminal mind came back," Dardenne said. "That's really picked up on in the doc."

Cannon speaking in the documentary came from interviews he did with Charles N. deGravelles, author of "Billy Cannon - A Long, Long Run" that was published in 2015. Other interviews are with Louisiana Radio Network/Tiger Rag President Jim Engster on his daily statewide "Talk Louisiana" radio show.

"People know bits and pieces of the Billy Cannon story," Midgett told Tiger Rag. "This documentary will provide the whole story." **TR**

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TS  
**Steve Van Buren**

Photo by:  
LSU Athletics



# Tigers In Canton

LSU Football's 6 Hall Of Fame Members Honored  
During Drew Brees' Induction Weekend

By KACE KIESCHNICK, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

The LSU football program's six Pro Football Hall of Fame members were honored during induction weekend in Canton, Ohio, August 7-9 while New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees attracted most of the headlines.

Here are LSU's six:

**Steve Van Buren Halfback,  
Class of 1965**

The Honduras native attended LSU from 1941-1943, but he was used primarily as a blocker until his final season. He earned All-SEC honors by rushing for 847 yards rushing and 16 touchdowns., completing

13 of 36 passing attempts for 160 yards, and scoring a nation-leading 98 points.

Van Buren played eight NFL seasons with the Eagles and was named All-NFL his first six. He won two NFL titles, eclipsed 1,000 rushing yards twice and earned four rushing titles.



### **Y.A. Tittle Quarterback, Class of 1971**

Tittle was a two-time All-SEC first-team selection at LSU from 1944-1947. He set school records with 162 completions on 330 passes for 2,525 yards and 23 touchdowns.

In 17 NFL seasons with Baltimore, San Francisco and New York Giants, he threw for 28,339 yards and 212 touchdowns, retiring with league records for career attempts, completions, yards, touchdowns and games played as well as the most passing TDs in a season (36) and a game (7).

Tittle led the league in completion percentage once and passing touchdowns twice. A seven-time Pro Bowl selection, he won the 1963 NFL MVP.

### **Jim Taylor Fullback, Class of 1976**

The Baton Rouge High product played his 1954 freshman season at LSU but spent a year at Hinds Community College before returning for his final two seasons. An All-American as a senior in 1957, he led the nation in scoring in 1956 and '57 and totaled 1,314 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns.

Taylor won four NFL championships and Super Bowl I with the Packers. He was a six-time All-Pro and named the 1962 NFL MVP. He totaled 10,539 yards and 93 touchdowns.

### **Johnny Robinson Safety, Class of 2019**

An All-State fullback at University High, Robinson helped the Tigers win the 1958 national championship as a junior and was named All-SEC twice for his two-way play. LSU was 25-7 during his career, and Robinson had 893 rushing yards, 453 receiving and 14 touchdowns.

Robinson played all 12 of his seasons with the Dallas Texans/Kansas City Chiefs. After two seasons at halfback, he switched to safety full time and led the AFL and NFL in interceptions twice. He was the third-leading interceptor in AFL history with 43 and made the AFL's All-Time Team. All-AFL five consecutive seasons, he was All-Pro in 1969 and All-NFL in 1970 and won the 1962 AFL title and Super Bowl IV.

### **Kevin Mawae Center/Offensive Lineman, Class of 2019**

From 1989-1993, Mawae was versatile athlete on LSU's front. He earned three All-SEC selections and was named third-team All-American as a senior. He played center, guard, tackle and tight end.

The Seahawks selected Mawae with the 36th pick in 1994. He spent four years there before signing with the New York Jets and ended his career with Tennessee. In 16 seasons, his blocking helped produce a 1,000-yard rusher 13 times. He was named to eight Pro Bowls and is a member of the 2000s All-Decade team.

### **Alan Faneca Offensive Guard, Class of 2021**

Faneca played for LSU from 1994-1997 and started his final 36 games. He allowed just one sack in his last season was named All-America and won the Jacobs Trophy as top blocker in the SEC. He received first team All-SEC twice.

A first round pick by Pittsburgh in 1998, he played 10 of 13 NFL seasons there, making nine straight Pro Bowls and All-Pro eight consecutive times - six of which were first team. He was on the Steelers' Super Bowl XL championship team, blocked for nine 1,000-yard rushers, five 3,000-yard passers and made the NFL's All-Decade Team of the 2000s. **TR**

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# Expanding The House Bertman Built

Jay Johnson Rebuilds LSU Baseball From A Poor 2026

By KACE KIESCHNICK, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

The last time an LSU baseball team failed to win more than 30 games in a full season was Paul Mainieri's first year at LSU in 2007 (29-26, 12-17 Southeastern Conference). He followed that campaign with a 49-19 (18-11 SEC)

season and a trip to the College World series in 2008 and a national title in 2009 (56-17, 20-10).

Coach Jay Johnson hopes to have a similar bounce back from a 30-29 (9-21 SEC) season this spring, and he is relying on

loaded transfer and freshman classes to lead the way.

Johnson's transfer portal class is ranked second in the country by Baseball America behind only Tennessee. Eight additions were ranked in the service's top



130 portal prospects, including the No. 1 prospect, Gonzaga right-handed pitcher Landon Hood, and No. 5 transfer, Oregon outfielder Angel Laya.

After going for too many one-dimensional power hitters in the portal last year, Johnson added proven contact hitters with speed and the defensive versatility to produce right away. He also prioritized younger talent who could contribute for more than one season and develop under his staff.

Laya fills both of those requirements. The lefty hitter slugged 14 homers as a freshman last season, but his 27-to-34 strikeout-walk ratio is what jumps off the page. He averaged .296 at the plate and recorded no errors in the field. With two years until he is eligible for the Major League Baseball Draft, Laya has everything Johnson was looking for.

Laya was the last of three outfield additions that also included Notre Dame's Bino Watters and Tulane's Jason Wachs. After a freshman All-American campaign, Watters was first-team All-Atlantic Coast Conference with the Irish last season as the lefty hit .362 with 18 doubles, 10 home runs and 51 RBIs.

Wachs is another left-hander who hit .327 with 54 RBIs, nine home runs and 21 doubles. He was 3-for-5 with a homer, double and three RBIs in Tulane's 13-6 loss at LSU last season.

Texas State infielder Dawson Park started his freshman season at second base and last year at shortstop, but he has the versatility to shift to third with the return of LSU shortstop Steven Milam. Park batted .301 with 13 homers last season.

Florida transfer Cade Kurland has 190 career starts for an elite SEC program, almost all at second base. He has a career .276 average, but more importantly, Kurland fielded at .994 in 2026 with one error over 108 assists and 54 put-outs with 19 double plays.

Hood headlines a group of transfer pitchers that includes USC's Diego Velazquez and South Florida's Kaden Smith. Hood pitched 54 and a third innings as a freshman at Gonzaga last year with a 2.48 ERA, 78 strikeouts and a .162 opposing batting average.

Johnson's transfers may shine immediately, but the freshmen signing class could impact as well. It is one of the top

incoming classes in the country - led by left-handed pitcher Logan Schmidt, who was picked in the second round by Cleveland in the MLB Draft this summer.

Schmidt was Perfect Game's No. 12 high school prospect and chose LSU over approximately \$1.7 million from Cleveland. He could be in LSU's weekend rotation right off and is not eligible for the MLB Draft until 2029. That's three potential seasons of elite pitching in Baton Rouge, barring a portal transfer.

Other top 100 prospects to make it to campus include outfielder Malachi Washington (No. 28), outfielder Nate Davis (No. 34), first baseman/outfielder Dominic Santarelli (No. 45), left-handed pitcher Lucas Nawrocki (No. 50) and right-handed pitcher Cooper Sides (No. 83).

Johnson also added left-handed pitcher Braxton Beaty (No. 122), right-hander Kolby Stringer (No. 162), right-handed pitcher Koleton Brady (No. 173), left-handed pitchers Colton Christman (No. 283) and Bradyn Cupit (No. 313) and right-handed pitcher Braydon Wisener (No. 385) to the bullpen. **TR**

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## SPORTS PHYSICALS: WHAT TO EXPECT

RUBIN PATEL, MD | PATIENT PLUS URGENT CARE

With fall sports and a new school year, 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 help ensure your body is developing normally and catch issues before they become 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 consider your health history to provide more specific advice and support 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 also give your health practitioner a chance to recommend medication or remedies that can help keep conditions under control, such as asthma. It also gives them a chance to ensure your vaccinations are up to date and that you meet all 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 a 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 participate in sports, walk in or book online at any of our locations so we can help you stay in top shape!





Tommy White  
Photo by: MLB.com



# Former Tigers Making Moves In Pro Baseball

By GLENN GUILBEAU, Tiger Rag Editor

Former LSU baseball slugger Tommy “Tanks” White didn’t take long to get acclimated to Major League pitching.

White, whose walk-off home run to beat No. 1 Wake Forest put LSU in the 2023 national championship series, went 4-for-5 with a run scored in his

third game as a Major Leaguer with the Athletics on July 20 in a 5-2 win at the Arizona Diamondbacks in Sacramento, California.



Just seven games later, he went 4-for-4 in a 4-3 win over Boston and finished his first 10 games in MLB hitting .358 (14-for-39). He recorded a hit in six of those games and notched more than one hit four times. White's .358 average at the time led MLB, but not officially as he didn't qualify for the statistics because he didn't have enough at-bats.

As of mid-August, he was hitting .278 and has been playing first base. Interestingly, he had no home runs or RBIs at the time.

White, a major reason why LSU won the 2023 national title, was called up by the Athletics for a July 17 game against Washington and went 1-for-4 in a 23-4 loss to the Nationals in Sacramento, where the A's play their home games until a move to Las Vegas in 2028.

LSU coach Jay Johnson, who is from near Sacramento, attended White's first game and also reunited with former LSU pitcher Gage Jump, who started the game for the A's.

White, 23, got five hits in his first 11 MLB at-bats for a .454 average at the time. A North Carolina State transfer who came to LSU in 2023, White was drafted with the first pick of the second round by the Athletics in 2024 and spent parts of two seasons in the minors before his promotion. He ranks eighth all-time at LSU with 75 home runs in three seasons, but he's turned himself into a contact hitter since going pro.

Jump, meanwhile, was 4-7 with a 4.59 ERA.

#### KADE ANDERSON MOVING ON UP

The next former LSU player to get the call to the Big Show will likely be left-handed pitcher Kade Anderson, who was the College World Series MVP in 2025 when the Tigers won the national championship. He was later the third pick of the first round by Seattle.

Anderson was 9-1 with a 1.20 ERA and 119 strikeouts in 82 and a third innings through early August for the Mariners' Double-A minor league affiliate in Little Rock, Arkansas.

#### ANTHONY EYANSON UPDATE

And Anthony Eyanson, LSU's No. 2 starter on the 2025 champions, will not be far behind. Eyanson was 4-0 with a 1.69 ERA and 60 strikeouts in 48 innings for the Double-A Portland (Maine) Sea Dogs in the Boston Red Sox organization before getting traded to the Baltimore Orioles' organization on August 3.

Eyanson joined the Orioles' Double-A team in Bowie, Maryland, called the Chesapeake Baysox. He is expected to have a chance to make the Orioles' big club next spring.

#### KEVIN GAUSMAN TRADED TO CUBS

Former LSU ace Kevin Gausman, who was 12-2 with a 2.77 ERA and 135 strikeouts in 123 and two-thirds innings for the Tigers in 2012, was traded by Toronto to the Chicago Cubs on Aug. 3.

A fan favorite in Toronto, Gausman was a Blue Jay since 2022. But he dropped to 5-10 this season with a 4.38 ERA. Gausman, 35, was 2-3 with a 2.93 ERA in the postseason in 2025 in five starts as Toronto reached the World Series before losing to the Los Angeles Dodgers in seven games. **TR**

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Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium, in Austin, TX, home of the Texas Longhorns who face the toughest schedule in the country.  
Photo by: Texas Athletics



# SEC Football Strength Of Schedule Rankings

LSU Has A Difficult Path In 2026, But It Didn't Make Top 5 Most Difficult List

By KACE KIESCHNICK, Tiger Rag Staff Writer

Schools around the Southeastern Conference are bracing for a grueling 2026. Thanks to the league's new nine-game conference schedule and the previous edict to play at least one Power Four program, 14 of the top 15 hardest schedules in the country, according to ESPN's Football Power Index (FPI) Strength of Schedule rankings, belong to the SEC.

Here is a look at the five toughest schedules in the SEC:

## 1. TEXAS

Texas has the pleasure of hosting preseason No. 1 Ohio State in week two. If the Longhorns can make it through the first three weeks of the season unscathed, their reward is a four-game stretch of games at

Tennessee, against Oklahoma in the Cotton Bowl after a bye and at home against Florida and Ole Miss. After a home game versus Mississippi State, Texas travels to Missouri and LSU back-to-back before closing out at Texas A&M.

That is seven total matchups with teams in the top 25 of the USA Today Preseason



Coaches poll, four of which are road SEC games and one at a neutral site.

## 2. OKLAHOMA

On the other side of the Red River Rivalry, the Sooners have another Big Ten ranked matchup at Michigan in week two. Oklahoma opens SEC play in week four at Georgia and then faces Texas after a bye week. After a stretch of likely unranked conference games, the Sooners end the season hosting Ole Miss and Texas A&M and at Missouri.

Oklahoma begins the SEC schedule against the two conference favorites. Even if the Sooners lose both, they should be in a position to make a playoff push come November. But that push will go through three more ranked opponents.

## 3. ARKANSAS

Arkansas is the not-so-proud owner of the FPI's hardest schedule by ESPN. The Razorbacks make road trips to Texas and Texas A&M and welcome Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri and LSU to Fayetteville. Before their SEC opener versus Georgia at 11 a.m., the Hogs make a trip to Utah with a 9:15 p.m. kickoff in Arkansas. That's essentially a lost day of recovery when considering travel time.

Arkansas' possible saving grace is that its only consecutive games against ranked opponents are the Aggies and Tennessee and Texas and LSU. However, the other SEC foes dispersed throughout are South Carolina, Auburn and Vanderbilt — not exactly a walk in the park. But Arkansas of late tends to be the walk in the park for opponents as it was 2-10 and 0-8 last season and is 4-20 in the SEC since 2023.

## 4. MISSISSIPPI STATE

Someone in the SEC scheduling committee does not like Mississippi State. There is only so much any team can do about what opponents it plays, but when the game falls is another story. The Bulldogs face South Carolina, Missouri, Alabama, LSU, Oklahoma and Texas in their first six conference games. They get a bye week before their matchup with the Tigers, but LSU and Texas are both on the road. It will be an SEC baptism by fire for quarterback Kamario Taylor.

Mississippi State then ends the season in Oxford for the Egg Bowl, making

that six preseason top 25 games, five of which come in the same stretch and half located in three of the toughest environments in college football.

## 5. OLE MISS

Ole Miss' schedule is almost as torturous as its Starkville brethren. The Rebels kick off the season against Louisville in Nashville and host LSU and Lane Kiffin's return in week three. An ill-timed bye week between Florida and Vanderbilt do no favors for a team who will welcome

Missouri, visit Texas, host Auburn and Georgia and head to Oklahoma from weeks seven to 11.

Like Arkansas and Oklahoma above, the Rebels have two top-four preseason opponents in Texas and Georgia. LSU, fortunately, plays only one of those. The early bye sets Ole Miss for a possibly painstaking war of attrition. A week 12 game against Wofford is the closest thing to a week off in the team's seven conference games following the bye. **TR**

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Jay Johnson. Photo by: Arizona Athletics

# Tommy Hodson Debuts As LSU Upsets Aggies, 35-17, To Open Season

*(Reprinted from September 20, 1986, Tiger Rag Magazine)*

By J.R. BALL

No. 14 LSU proved against No. 7 Texas A&M it could play with the national “big boys” this season. It is how the Tigers proved the point that was so eye-catching.

The offense – because of youth and inexperience – was supposed to struggle against an Aggie defense that stuffed Auburn Heisman winning tailback Bo Jackson in the Cotton Bowl last New Year’s Day. If LSU was to have a

chance, it would be up to the defense – a unit that finished third nationally in scoring defense last season – to win the game.

Somebody must have forgotten to show LSU the script.



Tommy Hodson, the first freshman quarterback to start an opener in LSU history, and junior tailback Sammy Martin needed just two series to mature as they rung up 401 total yards while pasting the Aggies, 35-17, before 79,713 – the second largest crowd in Tiger Stadium history – and a national ESPN prime time audience.

Hodson, a redshirt freshman from Central Lafourche High, completed 15 of 21 passes for 193 yards with a 3-yard touchdown pass to Martin for a 7-7 tie in the second quarter and a 5-yard TD to tight end Brian Kinchen for a 28-17 lead on the last play of the third quarter to put the game away.

He hit 15 of his last 18 because he went 0-for-3 to start.

“He got on the headphones and said, ‘Don’t worry, coach, I’ll be all right,’” LSU offensive coordinator Ed Zaunbrecher said.

Hodson was more than that as he repeatedly checked to other plays at the line.

“I’ve got to congratulate Tommy Hodson,” junior wide receiver Wendell Davis said after catching nine passes for 132 yards. “He kept his poise and threw the ball well in the pocket.”

Sophomore Mickey Guidry rotated in per Zaunbrecher’s two-quarterback system and completed 2 of 3 for 76 yards with a 66-yard TD Martin for a 14-14 tie in the second quarter. Zaunbrecher’s plan is to rotate in Guidry briefly so he can talk more to Hodson during the game.

Guidry noticed a blitz and audibled before the Martin touchdown.

“I noticed that no one was going to cover me, and he just threw me the ball,” Martin said.

“Coach Z got all the quarterbacks ready,” Hodson said. “Anybody who would have been in there would have done a good job because Coach Z did such a good job preparing us. We worked on this for two weeks, and we had great calls tonight.”

Martin rushed 12 times for 62 yards and caught five passes for 99 yards.

Freshman Harvey Williams, a star recruit from Hempstead, Texas, who chose LSU over Texas A&M (45 minutes away), rushed 14 times for 56 yards with a leaping 1-yard touchdown in the third quarter for a 21-17 lead.

“It was very exciting coming into Death Valley, as everybody refers to it,” Williams

said. “But I was a little nervous. Seeing how they stopped Bo Jackson, I didn’t know how we would do.”

Coach Bill Arnsparger and Zaunbrecher kept Williams out of the game until the second quarter to calm him down.

“But everything fell in place,” Williams said. “Now, I can go back home and have something to talk about.”

LSU’s defense struggled early, allowing 14 points and 206 yards amid missed tackles

in the first half before a tongue lashing by Arnsparger and some adjustments led to LSU holding A&M to a field goal and 155 yards in the second half.

“It’s one down,” Arnsparger said. “We’re excited about the good things we did.”

The Tigers will be heavily favored over Miami of Ohio at home next Saturday before opening SEC play at Florida.

“We want to make sure we keep this in perspective,” Arnsparger said. **TR**



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**Todd Horne**  
*Vice President / Executive Editor*

Jayden Daniels has a legitimate argument that LSU cannot commercially use his name, image and likeness forever without his permission.

He does not have a legitimate claim to ownership of No. 5.

Those are separate issues, and almost everything about this strange dispute becomes clearer once they are treated that way.

According to reporting on the cease-and-desist letter sent by Daniels' attorney, his agreement allowed LSU to use his NIL for 180 days after his final college game. I have not seen the executed agreement, so the exact contractual rights remain an open question. Four lawyers interviewed by The Advocate reached essentially the same conclusion: Daniels can object to certain commercial uses of his NIL, but he cannot force LSU to erase him from its history, its record books or its football program.

And he cannot stop LSU from giving No. 5 to DJ Pickett.

LSU's own bylaws make that particularly clear.

Effective Jan. 1, 2007, LSU changed what it meant to retire a jersey. From that point forward, retiring an athlete's jersey no longer permanently removed the number from circulation. A future LSU athlete can wear a number associated with a retired jersey at the head coach's discretion.

LSU grandfathered five numbers that had already been permanently retired under the old system: Pete Maravich's No. 23, Bob Pettit's No. 50 and Shaquille O'Neal's No. 33 in men's basketball; Skip Bertman's No. 15 in baseball; and Billy Cannon's No. 20 in football.

## Jayden Daniels Owns His NIL — Not LSU's No. 5

LSU's own bylaws say No. 5 and Joe Burrow's No. 9 can be worn again.

Those five numbers may never again be worn in their respective LSU sports.

That is why Cannon's 20 is the only LSU football number truly off limits. Tommy Casanova's 37, Jerry Stovall's 21 and Charles Alexander's 4 can all be worn again. Bert Jones' No. 7 will be retired this season, but 7 will remain available.

The same rule would apply if LSU eventually retires Joe Burrow's No. 9 jersey or Daniels' No. 5 jersey.

That makes Brian Kelly's handling of Pickett interesting. Kelly said Pickett had been promised No. 5 during recruiting, but he withheld it because LSU also had been protecting Burrow's No. 9. Kelly's reasoning was that the two Heisman winners should be treated consistently.

Lane Kiffin inherited the recruiting promise and reached a different conclusion: LSU made the promise, so LSU should honor it.

I agree.

And I would take Kiffin's principle one step farther.

If Brian Kelly's staff had promised DJ Pickett No. 9 instead of No. 5, I believe Kiffin would have given Pickett Joe Burrow's number.

He should have.

LSU's bylaws would allow it, and a principle about honoring recruiting promises cannot change simply because one former quarterback is more beloved than another.

Burrow's place in LSU history hardly needs protection from another player wearing 9. He went 25-3 as LSU's starter and in 2019 threw for 5,671 yards and 60 touchdowns while leading LSU to a 15-0 national championship season against one of the nation's toughest schedules.

Daniels was historically great, too. In 2023 he threw for 3,812 yards and 40 touchdowns, rushed for 1,134 more and produced 412.2 yards of total offense per game, actually more than Burrow's 402.6 in 2019.

Daniels also played behind a far worse defense. LSU allowed 28 points and 416.6 yards per game in 2023. His three losses came when LSU surrendered 45, 55 and 42 points.

Against Ole Miss, Daniels produced 513 yards of total offense and accounted for five touchdowns. LSU scored 49 points and still lost, 55-49. That is the kind of context a simple comparison of 25-3 and 19-7 completely misses.

The point is not to diminish either quarterback.

Both deserve to be honored.

Neither owns an LSU football number.

Daniels has every right to protect whatever commercial NIL rights remain his. LSU should respect those rights.

But No. 5 on DJ Pickett's jersey is not Jayden Daniels' NIL.

It is a number LSU promised to a current player.

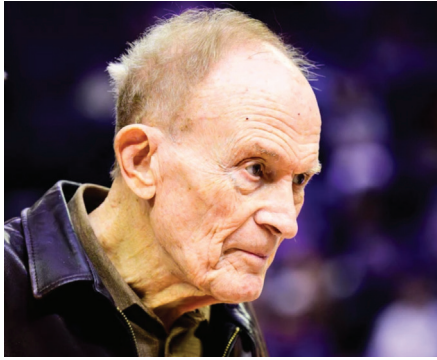
And under LSU's written rules, the same would be true of No. 9.

Only Billy Cannon's No. 20 is untouchable.

---

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 LSUanship School of Journalism. Reach Todd at [todd@tigerrag.com](mailto:todd@tigerrag.com)





**Dale Brown**  
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

## Each Of Us Is Responsible For The Person We Become

Each of us is responsible for the person we become. We can allow circumstances to control our lives, or we can permit ourselves to be pushed, dismayed, or frustrated by events, or we can learn to control our circumstances; and make things happen the way that we want them to happen; and make ourselves whatever we wish.

Do not be distracted and continue to work hard and your dreams will come true.

Life can be quite confusing at times and we will face temptations, which can lead to anxiety, depression, fear, hopelessness, and disappointments, but if we don't shut God out of our lives, we will then find peace, happiness and true success. Keep your faith in yourself because the only thing more powerful than fear is the boldness of faith which gives you the ability to whip anything.

There is a natural tendency to give up in all of us, but to overcome that feeling, God gives us the virtue of hope. You are never defeated until you quit in your own mind, and nobody controls that but you. Failure will never devour you, if your determination to succeed is strong enough and you honestly believe it.

Always remember to replace every negative thought with a positive thought, and the negative will constantly lose. One of the great discoveries that a person makes is to find out that they can do what they set their minds on doing. Whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon must inevitably come to pass.

Remember: People will bother you until you no longer let them! Don't mind criticism. If it is untrue, disregard it; if it is unfair, keep it from irritating you; if it is ignorant, smile; if it is justified, it is

not criticism – learn from it. Remember any fool can criticize, condemn and complain and most folks do.

*“Always remember to replace every negative thought with a positive thought, and the negative will constantly lose.”*

“You are capable of incredible things. Most people live and die without even scratching the surface of their potential. Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.” Matthew Kelly-author of Holy Moments.

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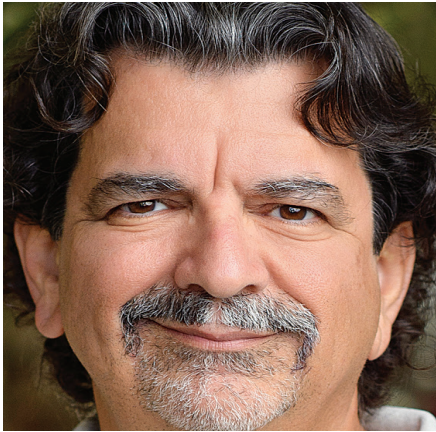


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**Jim Kleinpeter**

*Tiger Rag Featured Columnist*

That's some level-headed, mature and reasonable head football coach LSU has now.

The once snarky, entitled, run-for-cover-and-throw-the-clipboard Lane Kiffin is sporting a serious approach as his first LSU team hit the practice field for pre-season camp.

I kind of liked that old Lane Kiffin. He was interesting, while leaving a trail of angry fans and promises broken. It doesn't seem that long ago he was still dropping a needle on social media.

Yet, there he stood sounding like he was shelving all the fun he brought, with a ratcheting up of expectations. I'll always be skeptical of a coach who builds a program to the precipice of the College Football Playoffs, gets in and then leaves for a place where he has a better chance of winning the CFP.

It's all quite counterintuitive.

But here we are with the most excitement ever brought to Baton Rouge by a coaching hire. Did I say ever? Think about it. Nick Saban was an unknown when he arrived, Les Miles hadn't yet made waves with his kookiness while the fans seemed somewhat divided over Ed Orgeron and Brian Kelly.

Paul Dietzel was unknown and while Bill Arnsparger was known, he was a puzzling choice having made his name in the NFL. It is the splashiest hire in school history and at least in

## Lane Kiffin Has Grown Up Just In Time, He's 'Just Different' Now

the top five of all of college football. It has parallels to Alabama hiring Saban which may, in an odd sort of way, create extra satisfaction for some LSU fans.

Kiffin knows this. He's self-aware while trying not to peek at the hoopla, perhaps lessons learned through the smoke of burning couches and the heat of a California tarmac firing. While Tiger fans ramp up the hype, Kiffin is trying to lay low and lay out the plan.

"I don't know that I feel a lot of that," Kiffin said when asked how beneficial 'Lane Mania' is right now. "I'm not saying that to not answer. I'm in here so much, in the building. I don't get out a whole lot. I don't feel it that much because when I do, I do feel it. I hear about it. . . the season ticket sales, the fans' excitement for the opener, the ticket prices being high. I think that's great. That's all part of it."

The best part of his answer shows his acknowledgement that a coach's personality, even one slightly villainous, has its place in the overall scheme.

"When you hire a coach that's all part of what you hire, the energy that comes around it," he said. "That's the business element. It pays off in fan support; it pays off in donations; and it pays off in recruiting. It's working. Now obviously the No. 1 thing to do is win. With that comes expectations and the expectations are extremely high here. I knew that coming in and it matches how I think."

ESPN confirmed the feeling by naming the LSU-Clemson Week 1 meeting as its first College Gameday location. There's almost no chance the show won't be in Oxford two weeks later

when Kiffin returns for what stands to be the most hyped game of the season. It could turn into a three-pointer if LSU and Tennessee are both unbeaten when the Tigers go to Knoxville, where sofas and feelings are still smoldering, on Nov. 21.

Kiffin is also well-aware nothing winning the off-season means zilch. His confidence is high but certainly, the potential is there for a total bellyflop coming out of the gate.

"I know that as good as we are now, this is just the beginning," he said.

I'm just hoping it isn't the beginning of the end of the old Lane Kiffin, the one a columnist dubbed 'Little Lord Fauntleroy.' I'm hoping he doesn't play it too close to the vest, that at least once this season he limbers up his arm and fires a clipboard, or a headset, or a first-down marker javelin-style.

His X (Twitter) finger has got to be a little itchy, even this early.

I might even take some burning furniture or a barricaded street. That's never happened here. It couldn't happen here, could it?

---

*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*

At first blush, the dispute over the use of 5 on a Tiger jersey by someone other than Jayden Daniels is trivial, but rages over respect often take a life of their own. The controversy stands to last longer than the 26 glorious LSU performances from a human highlight reel. The Number 5 dilemma does not go away with DJ Pickett snaring the number Jayden Daniels seared into the memory bank as he passed, ran and danced his way to the Heisman Trophy in 2023.

The message outside the visitors' locker room is that Death Valley is the place where opponents' dreams come to die. Yet it is a location where numbers are resurrected even if there is a Heisman connection.

LSU is not the place for immortality. Most schools routinely retire Heisman recipient jerseys and numbers. USC has done it eight times and hasn't unretired O.J. Simpson's 32 even though it is widely believed he killed his wife Nicole and her friend, Ron Goldman, on June 12, 1994.

Some schools like Notre Dame and Alabama retire no numbers, allowing them to remain consistent on a touchy policy. Steve Spurrier, who won the 1966 Heisman Trophy at Florida, put his own number 11 back in circulation when he became head coach of the Gators and subsequent Heisman winners have their numbers in circulation at Gainesville. Ohio State stopped officially retiring football numbers in 2014.

Billy Cannon's 20 has been off limits in LSU competition since the legendary Tiger played his last college game at the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1, 1960. In 1987 when Cannon was incarcerated in Texas, a fellow did wear 20 in Tiger Stadium, wearing a uniform reminiscent of LSU. His name was Dennis Quaid, who was the star of "Everybody's All American."

Some purists objected when a diminutive thespian like Quaid was decked out in Tiger Stadium in a jersey reserved for the Adonis-like Cannon.

## LSU Should Have Same Policy from 9 to 5

Frank Deford's book of the same name took place at the University of North Carolina, but director Taylor Hackford chose LSU for the movie location and understood the mystique of Billy Cannon. Does the Daniels' debacle mean that Cannon's 20 and Joe Burrow's 9 are also available for future Bengals? Cannon's number is officially retired, but things change when present day considerations are weighed against honoring deceased stalwarts of yesterday.

An option for LSU is to officially retire 5 in honor of Daniels when Pickett's eligibility expires. Another partial remedy would have Pickett wear 05 in lieu of 5. Disrespecting Daniels opens the debate for Number 9. If 5 is free for use, it is difficult to rationalize an exception for protection of 9.

LSU risks alienating its support base over another symbolic salute to greatness. A prominent lawyer in Baton Rouge stopped writing checks to his alma mater when LSU removed former University President Troy Middleton's name from the library. Many Dale Brown admirers were incensed when the LSU Board lifted the only honor bestowed on the school's most prominent basketball coach months after the same board voted for Brown to receive exclusive recognition on the PMAC court.

LSU has also dismayed alums by preventing Pete Maravich from entering its Athletic Hall of Fame after he became the leading scorer in NCAA basketball history. Fifty-six years later, Pistol Pete still holds the record but is banned from the Hall under a rule that he is not eligible because he is not a college graduate. Maravich has been ostracized by his university despite the graduation requirement being waived at least four times for other inductees.

The greatest player ever coached by Skip Bertman is also not a member of the LSU Athletic Hall of Fame even though he does have a degree. Albert Belle left the program 39 years ago in controversy and has been blackballed from the Hall despite being the only major league slugger to slam 50 homers and 50 doubles in the same season and hitting 381 career homers for the Indians, White Sox and Orioles.

LSU will win any dispute with Daniels over name image and likeness in a Baton Rouge court, but the court of public opinion could be brutal. With his passing and running prowess, Daniels was the most complete quarterback LSU has produced. He boasts the most successful one-game performance in nearly a century of the SEC with 606 total yards. In a 52-35 win over Florida in 2023, Daniels passed for 372 yards and ran for 234 yards. He reigns as the only FBS player in one game to amass more than 350 yards in the air and more than

200 yards on the ground.

LSU can stop the current friction by allowing numbers for Cannon and Burrow to be worn by other players or rescind its decision on Daniels.

The Ole War Skule will pay the price if is inconsistent. Numbers today are not as meaningful as they once were because players on the same team are wearing the same numerals at the same time. But the conflict with Daniels has tentacles.

Heisman winners should enjoy comparable recognition. Any variation places one hero above another. There have been 90 recipients of college football's greatest honor. LSU should treat its three winners with the same reverence. Anything less invites a mess to be avoided.

### Baton Rouge Loses A Great Adopted Son

Stanley "Skip" Bertman logged 88 grand years from his birth in Detroit in 1938 to his death in Baton Rouge in 2026. When he died, he left 870 wins in 18 years at LSU where he won five national titles. A generation of his players remains to sing the praises of the man who lifted his program from insignificance on campus to the envy of the nation.

Bertman spent the last 43 years of life in the same neighborhood, coaching at one school with one wife. Sandy Bertman died 15 months ago at 87. She grew up in Brooklyn and met Skip at Maddie Ives Elementary School in Miami. They married and were together for 63 years.

The King and Queen of LSU Baseball raised four daughters and became icons in the local community.

Skip Bertman reached the pinnacle at the College World Series for the first time in 1991. He was 53 years old. His resilience in an uncertain profession is a path followed by Nick Saban, who won his first college football title at 52. When Bertman and Saban retired, together they had been national champions on 12 occasions.

At one time, the Ole War Skule employed Mark Emmert as chancellor, Joe Dean as athletic director, Saban as head football coach, Pat Henry as track & field coach and Bertman as baseball coach. There was an ample supply of testosterone flowing through LSU and a plethora of success.

Saban is the greatest football coach in LSU history while Bertman is the gold standard for baseball. It is notable that one man left the place that made him famous while the other man stayed.

Bertman was a person of immense loyalty with a legacy that will extend to generations to be born. He was a giant in the dugout and throughout the town he called home.



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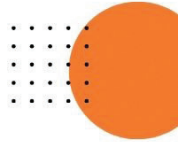
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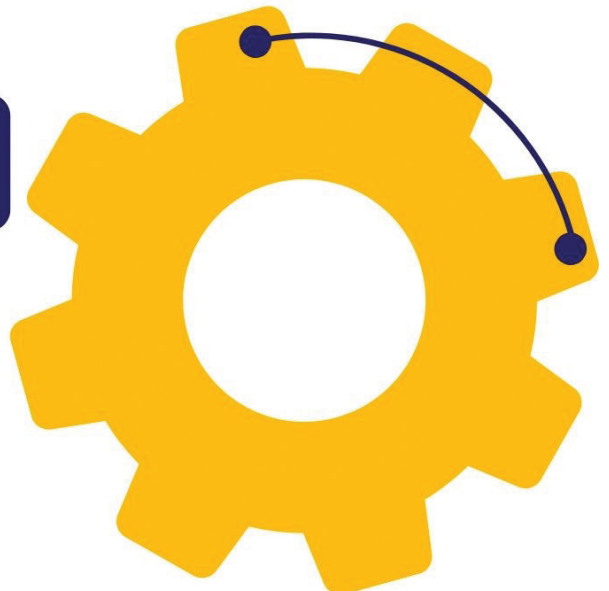
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