TIGER RAG

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2026-2027 BASKETBALL PREVIEW

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

WILL WADE LEFT SOME

KIM MULKEY 4 YEARS FROM LAST FINAL FOUR

INSIDE: LOST LEGENDS RON ABERNATHY, BOB PETTIT, NED CLARK

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Glenn Guilbeau
Tiger Rag Editor

Nearly Everything Will Wade Said Would Happen With His Roster Is Happening

As two LSU men's basketball players sat at the podium following a recent exhibition game, one of the player's jersey numbers was not in view.

So, I asked an LSU Sports Information Department student who the guy on the right was. He looked up, couldn't see his number either, and said, "I don't know. I'll ask."

I said, "Dude, you're the guy TO ask."

But not this year.

"You can't tell the players without a scorecard," was a popular pitch back in the day at Major League Baseball games by vendors hawking programs so fans could get to know their team.

Well, this pre-season at LSU, you often couldn't tell the players WITH a scorecard.

You could find numbers and names on rosters distributed to media before games, but some of the players listed weren't quite cleared yet by the NCAA and were not on LSU's official roster. LSU practiced with 15 players since September, but many were in the process of still getting eligible.

"I'm not trying to be a jerk. I'm not," LSU coach Will Wade said. "But I'm not going to talk anything about eligibility now, just because of the situation we've got."

Wade approached his dramatic roster restoration with the SEC and the NCAA very carefully to stay above reproach. Quite a change for him.

"We're not going to do anything that sacrifices what we're trying to do long term," he said. "We're not trying to bring any undue attention on any of that. We're not cutting any corners with SEC or NCAA rules. Because they're sure as hell looking at us on both ends."

Good things come to those who wait and try to do things right – even for NCAA and SEC bad boy Will Wade.

Because on Tuesday and Wednesday, Oct. 20-21, the seas parted for Wade's 2026-27 roster just two weeks before the regular season opener. Just like he said it would. Now, he said that in August, but hey, considering how terrible LSU basketball has been, what's a couple of months?

First, news broke on Oct. 20 of the NCAA clearing LSU freshman forward signee Saliou Niang (6-foot-6, 190 pounds, age 22), a former pro player in Bologna, Italy.

Then the papers cleared for freshman LSU center signee Brice Dessert (6-11, 247, age 23), formerly of the Andalou Efes pro team in Istanbul, Turkey.

Then one of the best gems of Wade's recruiting efforts officially became a Tiger – fifth-year senior transfer guard Skyy Clark (6-3, 210, age 23) of UCLA.

And on Oct. 21, the final piece, and a huge one – center Gilad Levy (7-3, 242) - was cleared. He was a former pro in Palencia, Spain.

Clark shot 42 percent from three-point range and 82 percent from the line last season while averaging 11.5 points for the Bruins, who finished 24-12 (13-7 Big Ten) and advanced in the NCAA Tournament.

In the end, Wade finished his roster fast break with slam dunk after slam dunk.

And he smartly passed on an ill-advised shot. Also on Oct. 20, news broke that Wade had officially given up trying to get former St. John's star RJ Luis eligible. This was a long shot at best, and it was best Wade move on, particularly with SEC commissioner Greg Sankey particularly upset about the Luis factor.

Luis signed with two NBA teams after not getting picked in the 2025 NBA Draft, and he was an integral part of Sankey's lawsuit against LSU.

Wade wised up. And now everyone can get to know his roster, including the players on it.

"It's actually funny," UCLA senior transfer point guard Donovan Dent said. "A lot of us got here a little late. So, we're like building connections as we're playing and practicing."

Picture this:

"Hey, nice to meet you. They teach you how to set a pick in Turkey?"

Yes, Wade's roster finally got through customs. And it appears to have the luggage to reach the NCAA Tournament.

"I'm thinking about releasing the final roster at midnight before the first game," Wade said. "Just to mess with the media."

I'll be there.

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.

MAILBAG

The 4th-And-1 Punt By Lane Kiffin That People Can't Quit Talking About

By GLENN GUILBEAU
Tiger Rag Editor

At some point, people will punt away their discussion of LSU coach Lane Kiffin not going for it on 4th-and-1 on the LSU 43-yard line with 1:46 to play and the Tigers leading 27-24 at Kentucky on Oct. 10.

Instead, Kiffin elected to punt, and it was a good one of 44 yards to the Kentucky 19-yard line with 1:36 to play, and the Wildcats had no timeouts. But Kentucky drove to the tying field goal and later won the game, 35-34, in overtime.

"Everybody says go for it," tweeted @ByChrisWright. "That's the easiest decision to make. The game wasn't demanding that. Kentucky hadn't done anything of late on offense. Right call. Wrong result."

Bam Outtadabayou at blaccboi82 tweeted, "I just felt at that point in time with the game still somewhat close and with Lane's bravado, that would be the perfect time for him to show it."

ESPN Peter Burns said on @PeterBurnsESPN that "Lane might not punt the rest of the year. Needed a yard to ice the game and didn't go for it."

In LSU's next game a week later against Mississippi State, Kiffin faced 4th-and-2 on the Tigers' second drive at the State 33-yard line. And Burns was right on the money. Kiffin went for it as Sam Leavitt completed a 4-yard pass, and LSU went on to a TD for a 14-0 lead in a 31-0 win.



FOR THE FAN ON THE FLY PRESENTED BY BTR



Dana O'Neil
@DanaONeilWriter

Just arrived at SEC Media day to learn that LSU basketball is fogged in and can't make their session. Gives Will Wade more time to scrimmage with his five dudes, I guess.



John Ewing
@johnewing

What a day in College Football:

No. 1 Georgia X
No. 2 Notre Dame X
No. 5 Indiana X
No. 6 Alabama X
No. 7 Texas X
No. 13 Mizzou X
No. 16 Mississippi State X
No. 18 Oklahoma State X

Maybe a 24-team playoff will be fun!



CJ (TigerBait.com)
@CJFWrites

It's truly hilarious how much the national media hates Will Wade and #LSU for things that they're just completely wrong about.

There are legit SIX incorrect statements about Wade, the Tigers' MBB roster, and eligibility statuses by Pat Forde in this article lmfao.



Jerit Roser
@JeritRoser

"I don't have a lot of empathy for injuries and breaks," says Lane Kiffin, who points to all the LSU players sitting on the sideline injured, plus other bad breaks he references including injunctions dynamics.

"We've had as bad of breaks as anybody."





Greg Sankey
Photo by: SEC

LANE KIFFIN

Saw the Trouble Coming.

Now College Football Is Changing the Rules.

The LSU coach warned that a nine-game SEC schedule would produce more losses without rewarding teams for playing tougher opponents. With a 24-team playoff effectively agreed upon and conference championship games nearing extinction, college football is undergoing its most sweeping transformation in generations.

By **TODD HORNE** | Tiger Rag Executive Editor

Photos by: LSU Athletics

There is something peculiar about a football conference that can make its own teams look worse simply by scheduling them against one another more often. Lane Kiffin understood that before the Southeastern Conference added a ninth league game. Now, halfway through the first season of the new arrangement, the LSU coach has the evidence to support his argument.

Consider what happened across the SEC on October 17.

Auburn, unranked and widely considered an afterthought in the conference championship race, traveled to Athens and knocked off No. 1 Georgia, 27-24. Tennessee beat Alabama, 26-10. Florida went to Austin and defeated Texas, 27-24. Kentucky, fresh from an overtime victory over LSU, beat Oklahoma, 21-13.

Four ranked teams lost conference games. Their opponents celebrated, the standings shifted, and the SEC acquired another collection of defeats that teams from other conferences would eventually use against it.

Kiffin had warned about precisely this.

"So, you just got some more losses," he said earlier in 2026. "You made it harder? You don't get more points when you already have the hardest schedule."

His complaint was not about competition. Kiffin spent the previous season taking Ole Miss to the College Football Playoff semifinals and came to LSU with a roster assembled to compete for a national championship. He understands what difficult schedules demand.

His objection was to the arithmetic.

Every additional SEC game produces one winner and one loser. With 16 members each playing a ninth conference opponent, the league guarantees itself eight additional defeats annually. Games that might previously have been comfortable nonconference victories have become contests against Arkansas, Auburn, Tennessee or another opponent with comparable resources, talent and ambitions.

The conference hasn't necessarily grown weaker. It has simply made winning harder.

And until the selection process accounts for that, Kiffin believes, the SEC is putting its own teams at a disadvantage.

"That's not a good idea until how they select teams is fixed with automatic bids and when strength of schedule matters how it should," he said before the season.

"Until that's fixed, it makes zero sense to go add another hard game, put teams on the road five times in this conference, which top to bottom is the hardest conference with the hardest stadiums."

The argument has acquired considerably more significance because college football is preparing to change nearly everything about the postseason.

The College Football Playoff and ESPN have reached a handshake agreement to expand from 12 teams to 24 beginning with the 2027 season. Formal ratification and final contracts remain, but the framework has effectively settled the direction of the sport.

And the expansion carries an extraordinary consequence: The major conferences are preparing to eliminate their championship games.

The SEC Championship Game, introduced in 1992 and subsequently copied across the country, is approaching its final appearance under the agreement.

After 35 seasons, a game that helped transform the economics of college football is about to become expendable.

The irony is considerable. The conference that pioneered the championship-game model has added another regular-season game just as the national postseason prepares to make its championship game obsolete.

For Kiffin, the two developments are inseparable.

The ninth conference game increases the difficulty of qualifying for the postseason. Doubling the playoff field substantially increases the opportunities to qualify. Eliminating the SEC Championship Game removes another punishing assignment for teams that have already survived the league schedule.

The combination represents a fundamental reconsideration of what a college football season is supposed to accomplish.

Under the emerging 24-team arrangement, 19 teams would receive at-large invitations. The regular-season champions of the SEC, Big Ten, ACC and Big 12 would receive automatic berths, along with the highest-ranked champion from the remaining six FBS conferences.

The top eight seeds would receive first-round byes. The first two rounds would be played on campus, with the quarterfinals and semifinals continuing at major bowl sites.

The national championship would remain in January.

For a conference whose best teams routinely encounter formidable opposition, 19 at-large positions offer considerably more protection against the consequences of difficult schedules than the current seven.

A three-loss SEC team that might find itself excluded from a 12-team playoff could become a legitimate postseason candidate under the expanded system.

But that creates another question: What happens to the meaning of the regular season when nearly twice as many teams can survive its disappointments?

For generations, college football distinguished itself from professional sports partly through the severity of its regular-season consequences. One defeat could ruin a championship pursuit. Two almost certainly could.

The 12-team playoff relaxed that standard. Twenty-four teams would relax it further.

(continued next page)

Supporters of expansion argue that more schools would remain relevant through November, with opportunities to earn favorable seeds, first-round byes and home playoff games. Opponents fear that the sport will sacrifice the urgency that made ordinary autumn Saturdays extraordinary.

Kiffin's position addresses a different concern. If college football intends to evaluate teams nationally, how should it distinguish a program that loses three SEC games from one that loses twice against less demanding competition?

His answer begins with recognizing the schedule each team actually plays.

During his October 19 press conference, Kiffin emphasized the depth of the SEC rather than merely the excellence of its highest-ranked members. Other conferences have outstanding teams, he acknowledged, but that does not automatically make their middle and lower divisions comparable to the SEC's.

There are few easy Saturdays, particularly away from home.

LSU's schedule illustrates the difficulty. Along with annual opponents Ole Miss, Arkansas and Texas A&M, the Tigers face Alabama, Auburn, Kentucky, Mississippi State, Tennessee and Texas in 2026.

Three of their final five conference games are on the road.

The following season, LSU exchanges those six rotating opponents for Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Vanderbilt.

The alternating arrangement guarantees more frequent meetings among SEC members, an obvious benefit for fans and television audiences. It does not guarantee that two teams finishing 7-2 have traveled equally difficult roads.

Without a conference championship game, those differences become even more significant.

The SEC's regular-season standings would determine its automatic playoff representative. Tiebreakers, strength of schedule and the relative difficulty of rotating opponents could consequently assume greater importance.

A league can expand its schedule without producing a perfectly balanced competition. Nine games among 16 schools cannot accomplish that.

The financial forces behind the transformation are enormous.

ESPN's expanded playoff agreement reportedly involves approximately $345 million in additional annual payments, offsetting the television revenue surrendered when the Power Four eliminate their championship games.

The SEC Championship Game alone became one of college football's most valuable annual properties. Its replacement would not be another single championship spectacle, but additional playoff inventory distributed across December and January.

Those games could also create a new kind of campus football occasion.

Imagine a December playoff game in Tiger Stadium, with the season at stake and a visiting opponent from another conference facing Baton Rouge on a cold evening.

The prospect is appealing. The physical cost is harder to dismiss.

A team advancing from the opening round through the national championship could play 17 games. Even a top-eight seed receiving a bye could finish with 16.

Kiffin has already confronted the consequences of trying to survive an unforgiving schedule with an injury-depleted roster. He assembled LSU's team around high-end talent, accepting a concentration of resources that he believed offered the greatest chance to compete for championships.

The injuries that followed exposed the vulnerability of that approach. In his October remarks, Kiffin explained that losing elite players also meant losing leadership from a team assembled largely through the transfer portal.

A longer postseason would make roster depth, recovery and personnel management even more important.

Nick Saban, whose Alabama dynasty helped define the SEC's modern supremacy, has expressed reservations about a 24-team tournament, favoring a smaller field and warning about the physical demands and commercial pressures driving expansion.

The disagreement reflects a sport searching for a new balance between opportunity, competitive integrity, tradition and revenue.

The four-team playoff lasted a decade. Its 12-team successor is already headed toward replacement after only three seasons.

The SEC Championship Game lasted much longer, beginning with Alabama's victory over Florida in Birmingham in 1992. It helped establish the conference's enormous television appeal and became an annual destination for programs competing for national relevance.

Now the championship game is preparing to disappear while the regular season grows more demanding and the national tournament grows larger.

Kiffin did not design those changes. He has been among the coaches warning about the consequences of implementing them without considering how the pieces fit together.

His arithmetic remains simple: Nine SEC games guarantee eight more SEC losses.

A 24-team playoff may finally give the conference enough invitations to absorb them.

But the question Kiffin raised will survive expansion. College football still must decide whether a team's record tells the whole story of its season — or whether the opponents responsible for that record deserve equal consideration.

The sport is changing the way it chooses its champion. Kiffin wants to make certain it understands what it is measuring. TR

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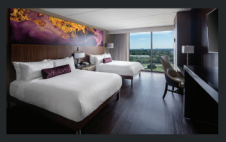
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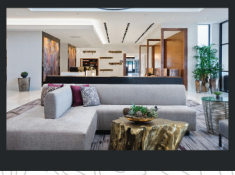




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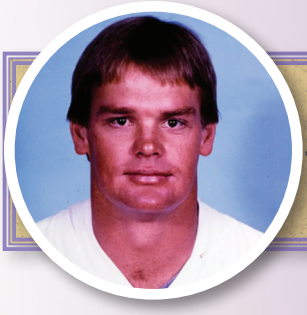
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COLLIS TEMPLE, JR.



11/10
HAPPY 74TH BIRTHDAY TO FORMER LSU FOOTBALL HEAD COACH
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Angel Reese
Photo by:Atlanta Dream

ANGEL REESE

Was A Dream In Her First Season For Atlanta In The WNBA

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

The Atlanta Dream could not have dreamt of a better result from its trade with Chicago for former LSU national champion forward Angel Reese after last season.

"Sat at home the last two years and watched it," Reese said after not making the WNBA playoffs in her first two seasons in the league with the Chicago Sky – one of the worst teams in the WNBA as it was 13-27 in 2024 and 10-34 last year.

Exactly 364 days later, Reese led the Atlanta Dream into the WNBA Finals for the first time since 2013 as she

scored 22 points with nine rebounds in the Dream's 85-83 win over the New York Liberty on Oct. 9 in New York to complete a three-game sweep.

Atlanta (30-14) opened the best-of-five WNBA Finals against Golden State, which swept Las Vegas, for the championship on Oct. 17, trying to win its first WNBA title.

Reese hit only 7 of 18 shots, but she had five offensive rebounds and three assists with three turnovers. She even hit 2 of 4 from three-point range, which has usually not been one of her strong suits.

The WNBA's Defensive Player of the Year this season, Reese was the key reason the Dream advanced to its first semifinals since 2018.

"The job isn't done. Happy where we are right now. We're not satisfied," said Reese, who took LSU to its only national championship in women's or men's basketball in the 2022-23 season with a victory over Caitlin Clark and Iowa.

Atlanta reached the WNBA Finals without top scorer Allisha Gray, who had been sidelined with a finger injury suffered in Game 1 of the semifinals. She missed Game 2 and warmed up before Game 3, but was ruled out about an hour before the tip.

It didn't matter. Reese took care of things as usual.

"I give the ownership group a lot of credit for having the patience to have this thing get where it is today," Atlanta general manager Dan Padover said. "We never got lottery luck or many free agents really. So, we had to do it through trades. That's definitely the hardest way to build a franchise."

Unless you get Reese, who put Atlanta over the top. The Dream got eliminated from the 2025 WNBA Playoffs by Indiana and Clark in an upset in the first round.

"I think she was looking at a few different places, but given our group, given our organization, our market, we were a natural fit for her," Padover said.

And Reese says she saw it coming.

"I manifested this. When I came to Atlanta, I knew what I was getting," she said. "This team has poured so much into me. We poured so much into each other. I posted and tweeted that I was manifesting the Finals, and this is my moment. I'm supposed to be here. I thank God for this moment. And I'm just so thankful."

So is the Dream.

"We brought in Angel, a dog," Atlanta guard Rhyne Howard said. "We're going to follow her. She's going to follow us. And so obviously she's been our anchor. She's been the one that's bringing that fight out in us."

Reese set WNBA regular season records for rebounds with 521 and double-doubles with 32. She averaged 18 points, 8.4 rebounds and 2.2 blocks in five games in the postseason before the WNBA Finals.

"I belong here," Reese said. "I wanted to help this team and do whatever it takes." TR





Todd Golden
Photo by: Florida Gators

Defending SEC Champion Florida *Picked To Win Title Again*

Todd Golden Building A Dynasty Like Billy Donovan Before Him

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

In many ways, Florida athletic director Scott Stricklin found the second coming of Billy Donovan when he hired 36-year-old San Francisco coach Todd Golden back in 2022.

Donovan left the Marshall job when he was 30 to become Florida's coach in 1996. By his third season, he was in the NCAA Tournament and started a run of nine straight trips to the Big Dance. By 2000, Donovan won his first of six Southeastern Conference regular season titles through 2014.

And by 2006, he won Florida's first basketball national championship and repeated in 2007.

Golden reached the NCAA Tournament in his second year at Florida in the 2023-24 season and won the national championship at age 39 in 2025 at 36-4 with a runner-up finish in the SEC. Last year, Golden won the SEC title, finishing 27-8 and 16-2 with a second-round finish in the NCAA Tournament.

At the SEC Tip-Off Media Days in Birmingham, Alabama, last month, league media picked Golden's Gators with his returning trio of Alex Condon, Thomas Haugh and Reuben Chinyelu to win the SEC title again.

Florida is the only SEC team to have three players make the preseason All-SEC team with those three.

"Me and Condon have been at the same school for four years. A lot of people can't say that," Haugh said. "The ability to go out there to play with the same guys as previous years makes this group really special."

The Gators also return their starting point guard from last season in Johnuel "Boogie" Fland.

"I think that continuity in being able to continue to build the partnership with me and the rest of the program will suit him really well for a successful season this year," Golden said.

Other key returners like 2026 SEC Sixth Man of the Year Urban Klavzar and Isaiah Brown make Florida a likely preseason No. 1. In 2009, North Carolina was the preseason No. 1 and finished No. 1. No one has done that since.

Chinyelu fielded this question at Media Days - "Florida will win the national title if, what?"

And he deadpanned, "There's no if, we're winning it. We want this really bad and we're going to get it."

The voting SEC media members agreed. They made the Gators a unanimous No. 1 pick.

After Florida, it was Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee and Alabama rounding out the top five. Vanderbilt came in at No. 6 with Kentucky, Missouri, Texas A&M and Auburn rounding out the top 10.

Georgia came in at 11 before 12th Oklahoma, 13th Ole Miss, 14th LSU, 15th Mississippi State and 16th South Carolina.

A 14th place finish will be a far cry from what "new" LSU basketball coach Will Wade was talking about when he spoke at his introductory press conference on March 30. It's actually Wade's second time as LSU's coach, following an impressive run from 2017-22 before getting fired for major recruiting violations.

"Our time is now," he proclaimed after leaving North Carolina State after one season. Wade resurfaced at McNeese State from 2023-25 following his LSU departure.

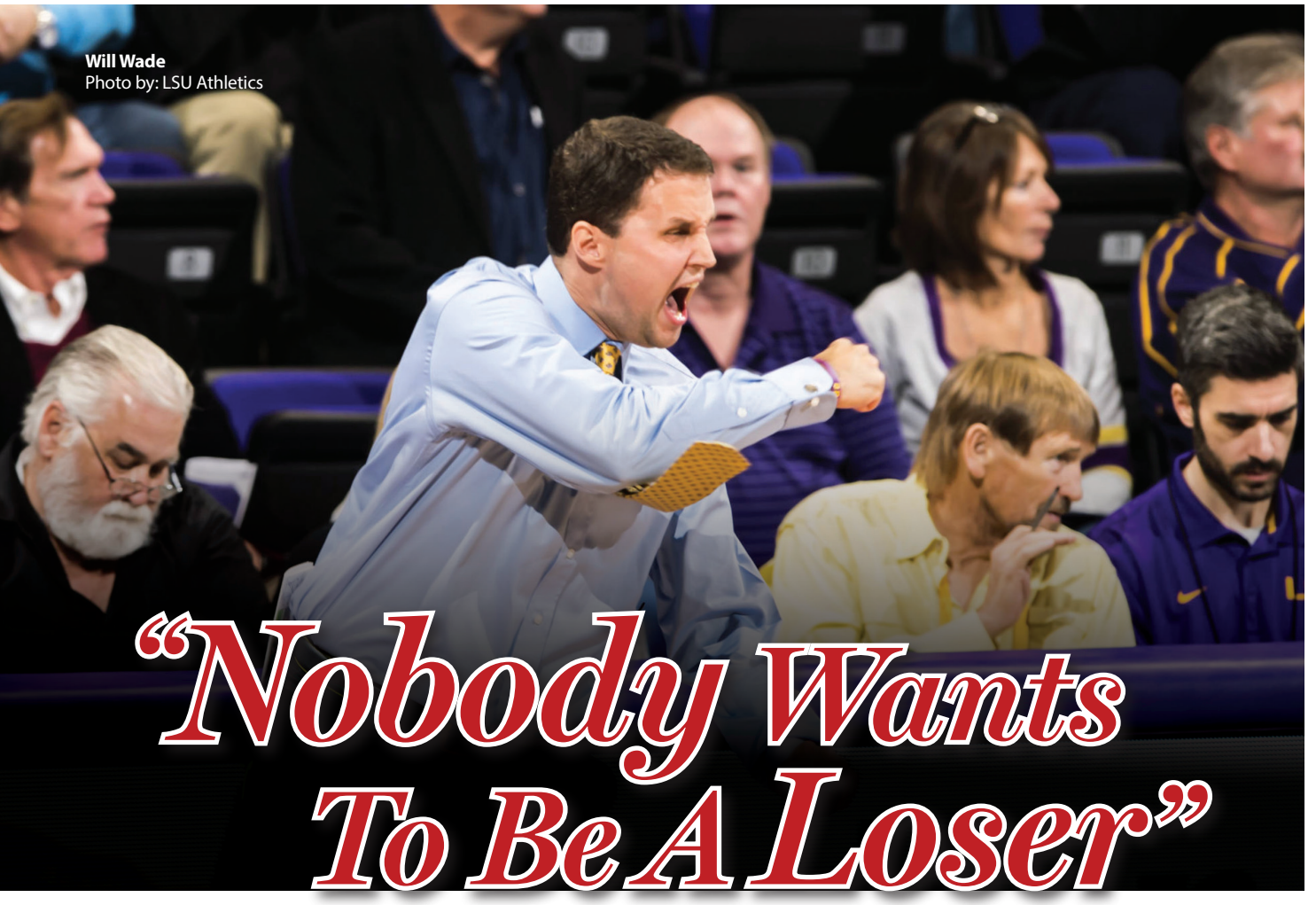
"I came here to win," he said. "We're going to win immediately."

But Wade was unable to put together a roster of more than four officially until October. As the regular season approached, he was still at 10 players and had tempered his early brashness when asked about being picked to finish 14th.

"Shoot, it's better than what we finished the last couple of years," Wade said as previous coach Matt McMahon finished in 15th and 16th the last two years with back-to-back 3-15 SEC records.

"So, I guess we're improving," Wade cracked. "We won't be in the top five, but we'll be better. We'll be competitive." TR





Will Wade
Photo by: LSU Athletics

"Nobody Wants To Be A Loser"

Will Wade Breaks Down The "New Normal" Of LSU Basketball

Reprinted from November, 2017, Tiger Rag Magazine

By **CODY WORSHAM**

If Will Wade's approach to coaching is anything like his approach to press conferences, LSU's first practice Friday will be a B.S.-free affair.

Wade got straight to business Monday at his first media session since being hired in April, laying out the state of the program just before practice tips off this week.

"There is a new normal," Wade said. "(The players) know what to expect now. They know what the new normal is, and you either do it or you get left behind. They are very clear about where our standards are, where we are and that we are not bending on anything on our expectations."

The first-year head coach by way of VCU dropped a few news nuggets on the day, noting North Texas transfer big man Jeremy Combs would be out for Friday's session after undergoing ankle surgery last week. Combs, who averaged a double-double two seasons ago for then-UNT head coach, now-LSU assistant Tony Benford, will be out six to eight weeks, Wade said, with a chance of being available for LSU's season opener against Alcorn State on Nov.10.

The loss is significant, as LSU's front line is thin, and Combs brought a physicality unique on the roster to the position.

"We've got some concerns down low," Wade said. "We're not the biggest team down low. It's my job, we've got to scheme around that."

The good news is Wade likes his two senior bigs, Duop Reath and Aaron Epps. While they won't fit into the offensive game plan Wade used at VCU last year, featuring frequent post entries and ample back-to-back play, both players bring different skills to the table, and Wade says the onus is on him to bring those talents out.

"We're going to have to adjust what we do," he said. "We're not going to be able to throw the ball in there and live in the paint off post feeds. It's my job put our post guys where we can get them the ball on the move."

Monday marked the first day of boot camp for LSU, which means three days of conditioning. All players must pass all three days of testing, or they can't participate in practice, Wade said. He's been tough on a team that went 10-21 last year, 2-16 in the SEC – though only five scholarship players return from that roster. Wade indicated the group has embraced the different approach, though.

"People want to be pushed and they want to reach their potential," he said. "Our guys are no different. I like the way our guys have worked for the most part. We have some guys that have worked very, very hard. I think nobody wants to be a loser. If you give them a map that says this is what helps us win, this is what wins, it's proven that it has won, they will do it and especially when they see that they get better."

Wade laid it on the line when asked what players have impressed him the most.

"Depends on what day," he said. "We don't have as much consistency as we need. Everybody has had their moments. Peacock today, feather duster tomorrow so we have to be good every day. You cannot rest of what happened yesterday."

Wade learned something unique to Louisiana when natives are asked a certain question.

"I've learned a lot about Louisiana geography because I'm always asking where they are from," he said. "But one thing I found out is when you ask where someone is from they tell you their high school."

The first-year coach is unquestionably shooting high.

"We want to be a championship-level program, which I think we all want to do," he said. "We didn't come here to get participation trophies." TR





Will Wade
Photo by: LSU Athletics

LSU Basketball Coach WILL WADE Returns To Baton Rouge

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

LSU new men's basketball coach Will Wade – for the second time that is – was barbecued throughout the country as he struggled to find players for a roster and get them eligible. That remained a work in progress as the season opener on Nov. 3 against LSU-New Orleans approached.

Literally and figuratively, Wade and his team were fogged out of the SEC Basketball Media Days press conferences in Birmingham, Alabama, last month, so he sat down with reporters via Zoom.

QUESTION: How has the SEC changed since the last time you coached LSU (2017-22)?

WILL WADE: There's nobody at the bottom of the league that's an easy game. We're picked at the bottom (14th of 16 by SEC media). We're not going to be an easy game. We'll see how that goes, but I think the league's got great depth now."

Q: Where have you made philosophical chanxges in your coaching and style of play?

WADE: Our philosophy is pretty similar. We've added some different things. We've tried to balance out our teams better. We're usually way better on offense than defense. And we've spent a lot more time on winning the margins, trying to win the games within the games and different things that we do there. So, I think that's an area where we've grown and gotten better. We'll see how it translates to the new SEC.

Q: How do you set expectations when you don't know who will be on your roster?

WADE: We've got a pretty good idea of who we're going to play, and we've got a pretty good idea of who's eligible. You guys in the media make a massive deal about a lot of this. We don't worry about what anybody else is really saying or what anybody else really thinks. We're pretty secure in who we are and pretty secure in what we're doing. And we'll see how it all shakes out. I've been open and transparent about that from the start. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. That's on me. I'm the one who made the decisions to do this. But we feel very confident about the group, and we feel very confident about the guys we have. With our full roster, we've got a puncher's chance in most games.

Q: Does LSU have better resources now than in your previous stint?

WADE: LSU's given us what we need to win, and so it's on us to win. It's on me to put together a winning program. That's our job.

Q: With all the roster controversy, how hungry are you to start playing games?

WADE: It's a process. I enjoy every day with these guys. But for as much has been made on the outside, we pretty much operate business as usual internally here.

Q: What is the status of RJ Luis (former St. John's player who signed with two NBA teams last season), who signed with LSU and has practiced?

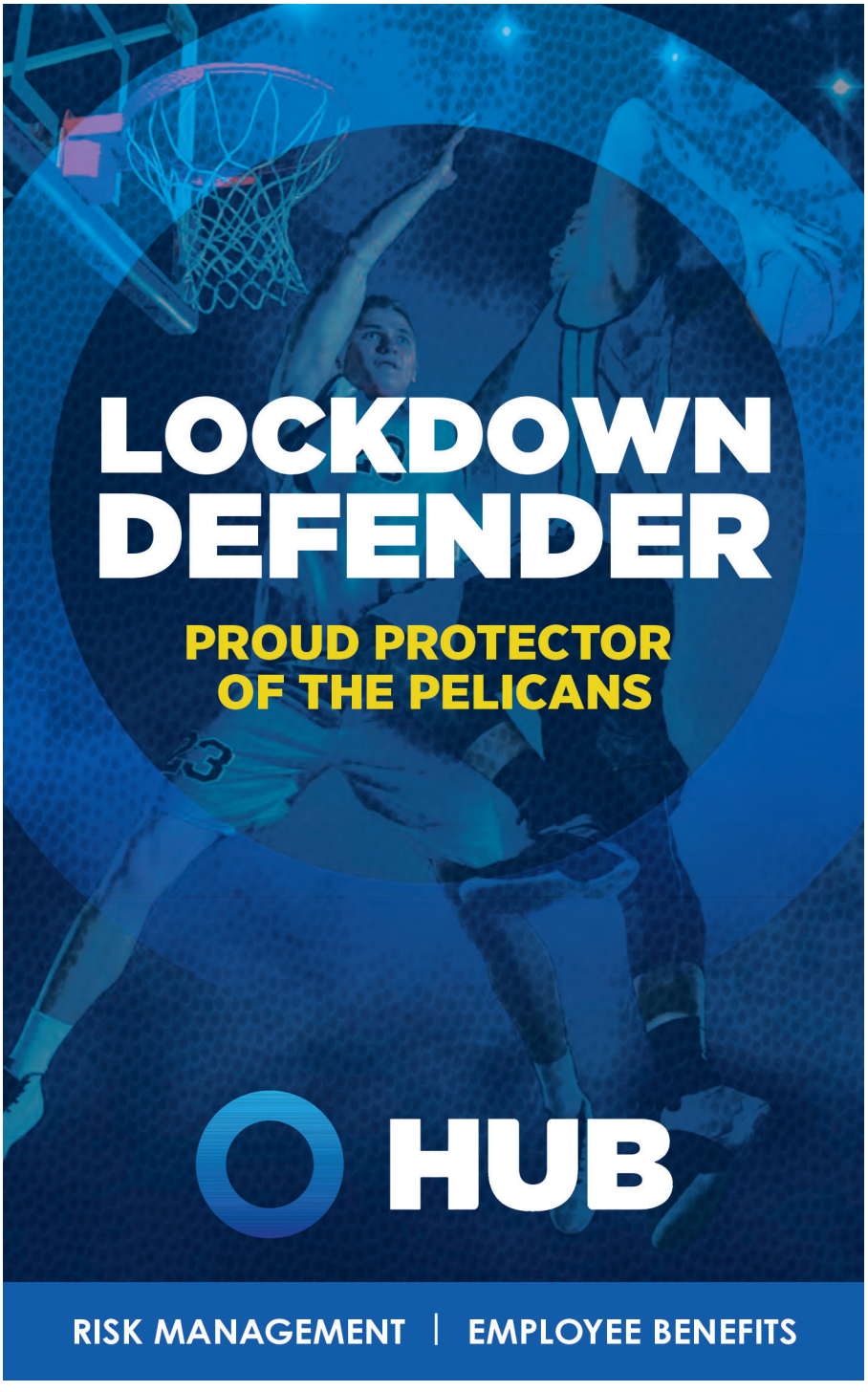
WADE: We're going to follow all the SEC protocols with him. I think it's been pretty clear what the SEC protocols are on that. He didn't travel with us to McNeese (opening exhibition on Oct. 8). And he hasn't been rostered.

Q: With the NCAA winning some eligibility cases, what makes you so confident you'll have this full roster by the season?

WADE: I just feel good about some of the information we have on the ground on some things. And I would caution that some things are painted as (NCAA) wins that maybe really aren't wins. And people run with that. I feel good about my information. We'll see if we're right."

Q: Are you sticking with the leisure wear, or are you bringing the sports coats back for games?

WADE: We're not going to wear a sport coat, that's for sure. TR





WILL WADE II

RALLIES WITH ROSTER FAST BREAK JUST IN TIME FOR THE SEASON

New Coach Says "We'll Have A Puncher's Chance" At Contending In SEC And The Nation

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

It was fitting that LSU basketball coach Will Wade and his team were fogged out the day they were supposed to fly to Birmingham, Alabama, for the SEC Media Days last month and got grounded in Baton Rouge.

"Really rough. You couldn't even see the runway," Wade said of the scene at the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport on October 13.

He could have been talking about his incoming roster at the time as it was still more than partly cloudy as the season opener approached on Nov. 3 against LSU-New Orleans in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center.

Photo by: LSU Athletics



But the fog gradually lifted in more ways than one, and when the sun set on Tuesday, Oct. 20, it might as well have been National Signing Day like in the old days.

Over a few hours on that day just two weeks before the season opener, the NCAA cleared three of Wade's top signees and brought his roster from four over the summer to a whopping 13 for the 2026-27 season.

This will be Wade's second stint at LSU after recharging a dormant program into a three-time NCAA Tournament team from 2017-22 before that all ended in a storm of NCAA recruiting violations and his firing.

"We're going to have a chance to compete with anybody in the SEC this season, so we'll be able to compete with anybody nationally," Wade said. "We're excited about the guys we have. We'll have a puncher's chance of beating anybody on our schedule."

The terrific trio of transfers that the NCAA cleared on Oct. 20 were freshman forward Saliou Niang (6-foot-6, 190, age 22) of the Virtus pro team in Bologna, Italy, freshman center Brice Dessert (6-11, 247, age 23) of the Andalou Efes pro team in Istanbul, Turkey, and fifth-year senior UCLA transfer guard Skyy Clark (6-3, 210, age 23), who averaged 11.5 points last season while shooting 42 percent from three-point range and 82 percent from the line.

All three could start.

"I believe on November 3, we will roll out there with a very good team," Wade said.

As the opener approached, the NCAA was close to clearing freshman center giant Gilad Levy (7-3, 242, age 24) of the Palencia pro team in Spain.

Then a day later on Oct. 21, freshman center giant Gilad Levy (7-3, 242, age 24) of the Palencia pro team in Spain was cleared, bringing LSU's roster to a whopping 14.

Wade can't wait. After resurfacing at McNeese for two seasons (2023-25) following his firing and then at North Carolina State for the 2025-26 season, Wade wants to pick up where he left off. He won LSU first SEC title in 10 years in 2018-19 at 25-5 and 15-2 and reached the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16. Two more NCAA Tournaments followed.

"This is a great place, and I didn't like leaving things unfinished," he said. "We can win big at LSU."

And that could happen now. Fifth-year senior point guard Donovan Dent (6-2, 185 pounds), another UCLA transfer, looked SEC ready immediately in exhibition games as did Kansas State senior transfer guard Abdi Bashir Jr. (6-5, 170).

And freshman center Michael Ruzic (7-0, 235), formerly of the Joventut pro team in Spain, was particularly impressive.

"He's going to be a phenomenal player," Wade said. "He already is."

Senior forward transfer Mouhamed Dioubate (6-7, 235) will add veteran depth at his third SEC school after Kentucky and Alabama.

Michigan State junior transfer guard Divine Ugochukwu started for the Spartans until breaking a bone in his foot in February. He shot 44.2 percent from three-point range.

"We've got an older, veteran and big team," Wade said. "And we've got kids from all over the world. Sure, it's going to take us some time to grow and come together. But we're going to contend now."

And then.

"I believe that eventually we can win a national championship at LSU," he said. "That's the goal, and that's why we came back." TR



FORMER UCLA GUARD DONOVAN DENT IS AT LSU FOR ONE REASON

Will Wade And The Culture He Creates

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

Donovan Dent
Photo by: LSU Athletics

LSU new point guard Donovan Dent did not hesitate when asked what brought him to LSU, which is coming off two 3-15 finishes in the Southeastern Conference and 14-18 and 15-17 overall records.

At UCLA last season, Dent (6-foot-2, 185 pounds) averaged 13.3 points and 7.6 assists through 34 starts on a team that finished 24-12, 13-7 in the Big Ten and advanced in the NCAA Tournament.

LSU? Really? A program that last reached the NCAA Tournament in 2022?

"Really, it was just Will Wade's culture," Dent said.

That was Wade that last took the Tigers to the NCAA Tournament in 2022 (22-11, 9-9 SEC), in 2021 (19-10, 11-6) and in a banner 2018-19 season at 25-5 with a NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 finish and the program's first SEC regular season title since 2009 at 15-2. Before 2019, LSU had not won two games in an NCAA Tournament since coach John Brady's Final Four team in 2005-06.

"He instills a lot of confidence in his players," Dent said. "He lets you get up and down on offense. He's one of the best player coaches, I think, in the nation. And just the atmosphere of LSU. Like, why not come to Baton Rouge and have some fun out here?"

The Wade culture also got him fired from LSU in March of 2022 for a slew of major recruiting violations. But after stints at McNeese State (2023-25) and North Carolina State last season, he is back.

"We were just a little ahead of our time in NIL," Wade cracked. "Everybody says it's Name, Image and Likeness. I say, 'Now It's Legal.'"

And Dent is ready to give Wade his money's worth.

"He's the leader," Wade said. "He's the point guard. The team follows him. He's really growing. There are some more levels he can get to."

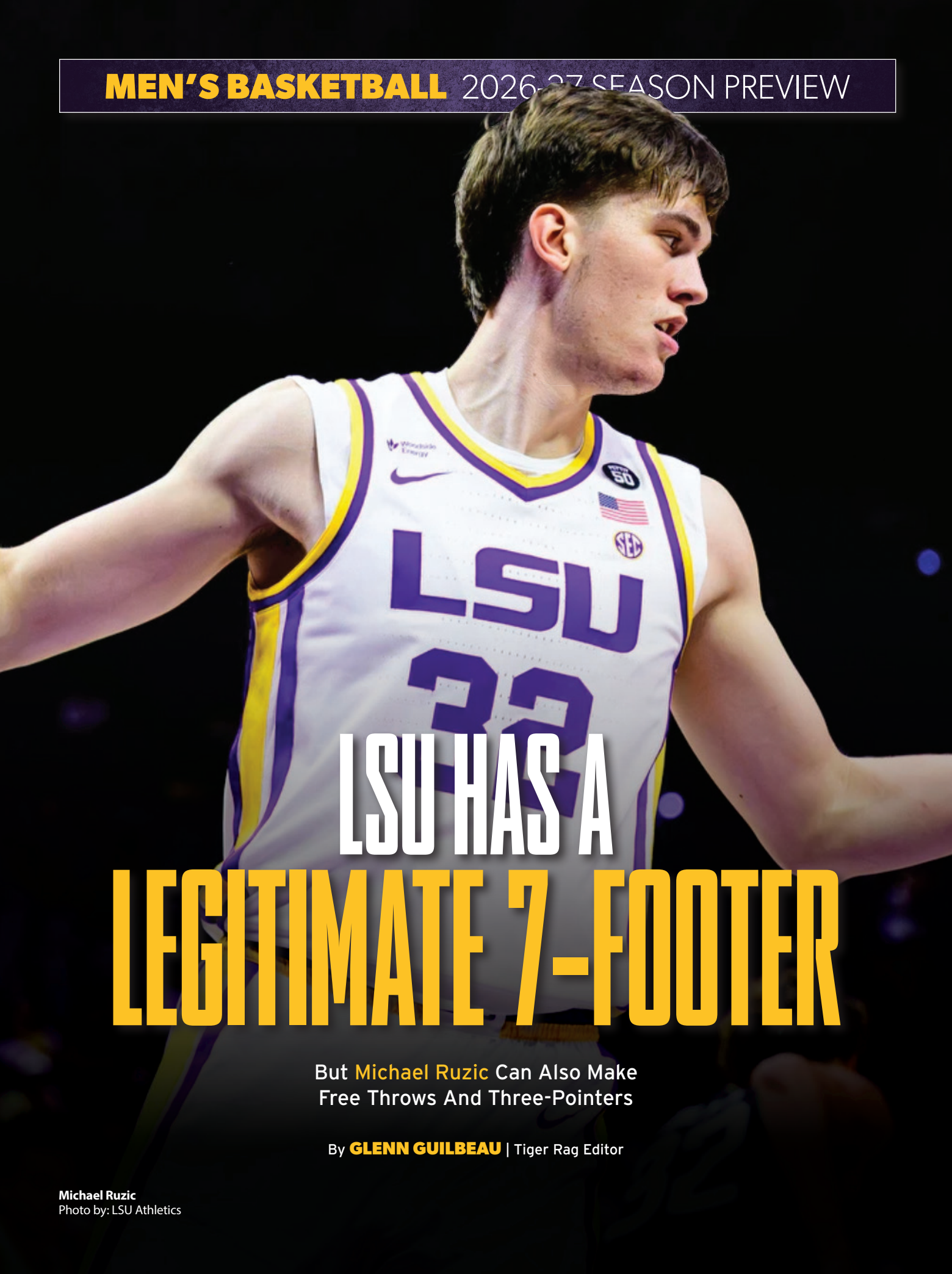
BEFORE LSU

Played three seasons at New Mexico and last season at UCLA … For his college career averaged 13.4 points, 2.5 rebounds, 5.5 assists and 1.4 steals … At least 10 assists in 18 career games.

LAST SEASON

Played in 35 games and started 34 at UCLA … Second on the team in scoring (13.3 ppg) and led the Bruins in assists (265 assists, 7.6 apg) … Also averaged 2.9 rebounds and a team-leading 1.7 steals per game … Shot 40.8 percent from the field … Scored at least 10 points in 26 games and had eight games with at least 20 points … Season best 30 points on 10-of-16 shooting in the UCLA win over USC (Feb. 24) … Logged a triple double in the UCLA win over Rutgers at the Big Ten Tournament (March 12) totaling 12 points, a career-high 10 rebounds and 12 assists … First UCLA player to register a triple-double since 2013 … 10 assists or more in 11 games … 10 double doubles … 265 assists and 65 turnovers, an assist-turnover ratio of 4.1 … Third in the Big Ten and third in the nation in assists per game and assist-turnover ratio … Second most assists (265) in UCLA history … UCLA's first player with three consecutive point-assist double doubles. TR





LSU HAS A LEGITIMATE 7-FOOTER

But Michael Ruzic Can Also Make Free Throws And Three-Pointers

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

Michael Ruzic
Photo by: LSU Athletics

It didn't take long for McNeese State coach Bill Armstrong to notice something about LSU's 7-foot center during an exhibition game last month in Lake Charles.

"They said he was a pro, and I believe he is," Armstrong said of freshman Michael Ruzic, who scored 11 points with 16 rebounds in the Tigers' 63-60 win.

Ruzic (7-0, 235 pounds), a 19-year-old native of Zadar, Croatia, played last spring for the Joventut pro team in Catalonia, Spain.

He followed the McNeese game with 15 points, 13 rebounds, four blocked shots and a three-pointer in an 85-81 exhibition win over Central Florida.

"Yeah, he's a dog," LSU senior transfer guard Abdi Bashir Jr. said. "He just gets it done. He doesn't complain about anything. He works hard. He's a big body inside. He can shoot. He can do everything on the floor. He's going to be a pro for sure."

Well, he already was.

"He has been awesome," LSU coach Will Wade said. "Really good player. He's only 19. He's going to be a great player, a phenomenal player for us. He's a warrior and a great person. He can play inside. He can make threes. He shot over 40 percent from the three in his last month in Spain. He's a very good passer."

Wade couldn't stop.

"He can drive and shoot the jump hook," he said. "He's just a very skilled player, and he's just going to continue to get better. We're very excited about him."

BEFORE LSU

Played with the Croatian national Under 16 team at the 2022 FIBA U16 European Championship, averaging 7.0 points and 5.4 rebounds … Also played in the U18 Euro Championship … In 2022-23, led KK Zadar in Croatia to the cadet championship … Also competed at the Euroleague Basketball Next Generation Tournament, averaging 19 points … Played for Jovenut Badalona in both the EuroCup and Liga ACB in 2023-24, averaging 6.5 points in the EuroCup and 4.9 in Liga ACB … At the time he was the sixth-youngest player in team history for Joventut and became only the second player in team history to have a double-double under the age of 18 … Signed a contract extension with Joventut in 2024 … In 2025-26 played 29 games with Joventut, averaging 17.8 minutes a game, 56.7 percent from the floor, 7.0 points and 4.0 rebounds … In November 2025, playing for Croatia, in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 European qualifiers, he played 28 minutes, leading Croatia to a win over Israel, scoring 23 points with nine rebounds and three assists … He made 11-of-13 from two-point range … Birthdate is October 4, 2006 … Received his first name from top athletes Michael Jordan and Michael Schumacher … Father is 6-foot-10 Tomislav Ruzic, who played center for several pro teams from 1996-2017 and is currently an assistant pro coach in Croatia … Mother Barbara is considered one of the best Croatian volleyball players of all time … His grandfather, Ivica Jelic, competed in the 1980 Summer Olympics … His aunt, Vesna Jelic, competed at the 2000 Summer Olympics. TR





KENTUCKY TRANSFER MOUHAMED DIOUBATE WAS LSU'S ONLY PLAYER FOR SEVERAL WEEKS LAST SPRING

Will Wade Likes The Guard/Forward's Versatility

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

Mouhamed Dioubate
Photo by: LSU Athletics

LSU senior transfer guard/forward Mouhamed Dioubate, formerly of Kentucky, is just glad to have some teammates.

He was the first player to join coach Will Wade's roster for the 2026-27 season on April 20. All previous LSU players on previous coach Matt McMahon's team were not retained.

Dioubate (6-foot-7, 235) didn't have his first teammate until May 7 when Michigan State junior guard Divine Ugochuckwu transferred in. Guard Abdi Bashir Jr., a senior transfer from Kansas State, joined up the next day.

And then there was four when senior guard Austin Nunez, formerly of Texas-San Antonio, became a Tigers on May 18.

And that's where the official roster on LSU's website sat until mid-October when it grew to 10 and 11. The Tigers were practicing with 15 players since September, but several of those were awaiting NCAA clearance as many were former pro players from overseas.

"We've been practicing every day for a good while," Dioubate said during SEC Media Days last month on a teleconference as the Tigers' flight to Birmingham, Alabama, was fogged out.

"We're excited," he said. "We're all fired up to go. We have a full team now. We've got some talent. We have a lot to prove. But I feel like this year is going to be a good year for us."

Dioubate played in 31 games for Kentucky last season with 10 starts and averaged 8.8 points with 5.5 rebounds. But Wade sees him putting up more offense this season.

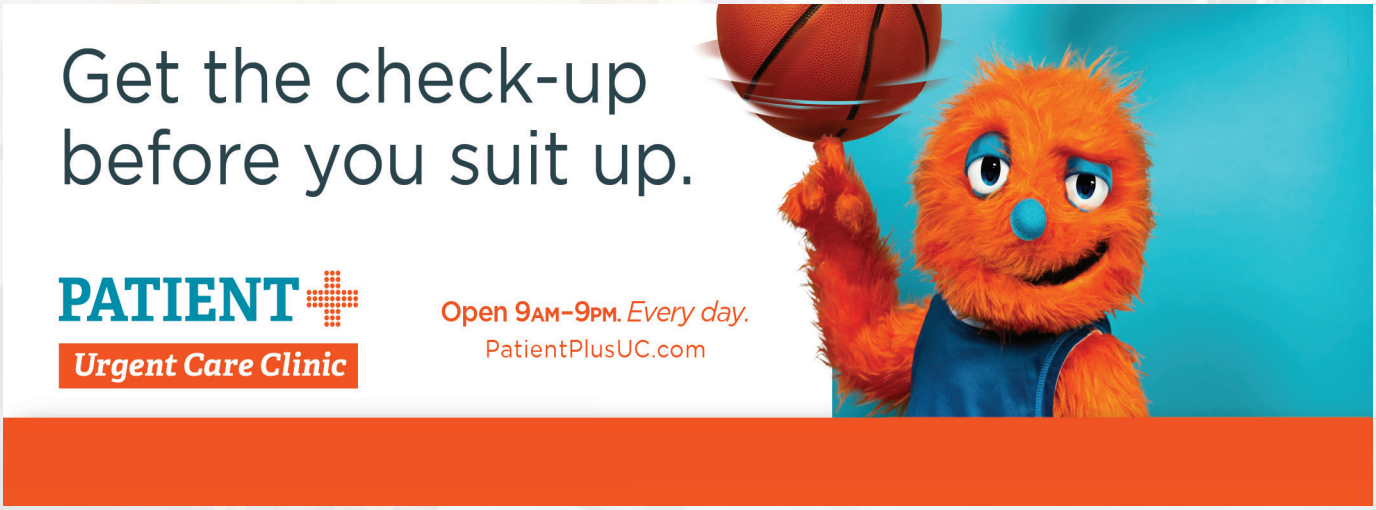
"He's got to get a little bit more skill," Wade said. "He's developing. We've worked with him extensively on his jump shot. I'm not saying he's going to be a knock-down shooter. But he's going to be a solid shooter. When he gets a head of steam downhill driving that ball, something good is going to happen. He's good at drawing fouls. He's a very versatile player and has got a lot of stuff that can help your team win. He's a good finisher at the rim."

LAST SEASON

Dioubate posted 11 double figure scoring efforts with two double doubles … He led the team in blocks 10 times and eight time led in rebounds … He scored 17 points, a team-high-tying eight rebounds, while also contributing three blocks and a steal in the NCAA Tournament win over Santa Clara … Had 14 points versus Florida in the SEC Tournament … His season high in SEC scoring was 19 points, while also adding seven rebounds at Texas A&M … Snared the game-clinching offensive rebound in the final seconds of the game to lift the Cats to an upset of No. 25 Tennessee at home … Had a career-high five blocks at Vanderbilt … Had 14 points, 12 rebounds and five steals in win over Indiana … Also had a 20-11 double double against Eastern Illinois (8-of-9 from the field) … Eight career double doubles.

AT ALABAMA 2024-25

Played in all 37 games, helping the Tide reach the Elite Eight … Averaged 7.2 points and 5.9 rebounds per game … Six double doubles, including four in SEC … Led the team in rebounding 10 times, including a career high 16 against Houston. TR



MEN'S BASKETBALL ROSTER & SCHEDULE



LUKE STANSBURY

0 | GUARD • SR | 6-3 | 185

BOWLING GREEN, KY. | GREENWOOD HS
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN



ABDI BASHIR, JR.

1 | GUARD • SR | 6-5 | 170

OMAHA, NEB. | PHH PREP HS
KANSAS STATE



AUSTIN NUNEZ

2 | GUARD • 5TH SR | 6-2 | 175

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS | WAGNER HS
UTSA



DONOVAN DENT

3 | GUARD • 5TH SR | 6-2 | 185

RIVERSIDE, CALIF. | CORONA CENTENNIAL HS
UCLA



BRADLEY FIFE

4 | GUARD • FR | 5-10 | 150

BATON ROUGE, LA.
CATHOLIC HS



JORDAN BENDER

5 | FORWARD • FR | 6-7 | 200

LOUISVILLE, KY.
NORTHSIDE CHRISTIAN HS



SALIOU NIANG

7 | FORWARD • FR | 6-7 | 200

MANDELLO DEL LARIO, ITALY
PRESTIGE ACADEMY



MOUHAMED DIOUBATE

10 | FORWARD • SR | 6-8 | 235

QUEENS, N.Y. | PUTNAM SCIENCE ACADEMY
KENTUCKY



BRICE DESSERT

13 | CENTER • 5TH SR | 6-11 | 255

PONTOISE, FRANCE
LYCÉE MARCELIN BERTHELOT



GILAD LEVY

18 | CENTER • FR | 7-3 | 275

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL
GRASSROOTS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY



STRAKE PEARSON

22 | CENTER • FR | 7-0 | 260

PROSPER, TEXAS
IMG ACADEMY



MICHAEL RUZIC

32 | CENTER • FR | 7-0 | 235

ZADAR, CROATIA
E-GIMNAZIJA



SKYY CLARK

55 | GUARD • 5TH SR | 6-3 | 210

LOS ANGELES, CA | MONTEVERDE ACADEMY
UCLA



DIVINE UGOCHUKWU

99 | GUARD • JR | 6-3 | 200

SUGAR LAND, TEXAS | CLEMENTS HS
MICHIGAN STATE

Thu, Oct 8
at **MCNEESE** EXHIBITION
Lake Charles, La. | Won 63-60

Wed, Oct 14
vs. **UCF** EXHIBITION
Baton Rouge, La.| Won 85-81

Sat, Oct 24
at **FLORIDA STATE** EXHIBITION
Tallahassee, Fla. | 12:00 PM CT

Tue, Nov 3
vs. **LSU NEW ORLEANS**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Fri, Nov 6
vs. **TEXAS SOUTHERN**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Mon, Nov 9
vs. **LOUISIANA TECH**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Sat, Nov 14
vs. **GONZAGA**
Spokane, Wash.| TBA

Wed, Nov 18
vs. **ULM**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Sat, Nov 21
vs. **QUEENS**
Baton Rouge, La. | TBA

Wed, Nov 25
vs. **ARIZONA STATE**
Palm Desert, Calif. | 1:00 PM CT

Thu, Nov 26
vs. **SMU**
Palm Desert, Calif. | 6:00 PM CT

Tue, Dec 1
vs. **WAKE FOREST**
Baton Rouge, La. | 8:00 PM CT

Sat, Dec 5
vs. **HOFSTRA**
Baton Rouge, La. | 1:00 PM CT

Sun, Dec 13
vs. **HOUSTON**
Houston, Texas | 2:30 PM CT

Fri, Dec 18
vs. **HIGH POINT**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Tue, Dec 22
vs. **UL-LAFAYETTE**
Baton Rouge, La. | 5:00 PM CT

Mon, Dec 28
vs. **WASHINGTON ST.**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Sat, Jan 2
vs. **SOUTH CAROLINA**
Baton Rouge, La. | 2:30 PM CT

Tue, Jan 5
at **ALABAMA**
Tuscaloosa, Ala. | 6:00 PM CT

Sat, Jan 9
vs. **TENNESSEE**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:30 PM CT

Wed, Jan 13
at **KENTUCKY**
Lexington, Ky. | 6:00 PM CT

Sat, Jan 16
at **TEXAS A&M**
Bryan-College Station, Texas | 5:00 PM CT

Tue, Jan 19
vs. **TEXAS**
Baton Rouge, La. | 8:00 PM CT

Sat, Jan 23
vs. **AUBURN**
Baton Rouge, La. | 2:30 PM CT

Tue, Jan 26
at **ARKANSAS**
Fayetteville, Ark. | 8:00 PM CT

Sat, Jan 30
at **GEORGIA**
Athens, Ga. | 2:30 PM CT

Tue, Feb 2
vs. **VANDERBILT**
Baton Rouge, La. | 8:00 PM CT

Sat, Feb 6
vs. **OLE MISS**
Baton Rouge, La. | 3:00 PM CT

Sat, Feb 13
at **OKLAHOMA**
Norman, Okla. | 12:00 PM CT

Wed, Feb 17
vs. **FLORIDA**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:00 PM CT

Sat, Feb 20
at **MISSISSIPPI STATE**
Starkville, Miss. | 5:00 PM CT

Wed, Feb 24
at **AUBURN**
Auburn, Ala. | 6:00 PM CT

Sat, Feb 27
vs. **TEXAS A&M**
Baton Rouge, La. | 7:30 PM CT

Tue, Mar 2
vs. **ARKANSAS**
Baton Rouge, La. | 8:00 PM CT

Sat, Mar 6
at **MISSOURI**
Columbia, Mo. | 1:00 PM CT

SEC TOURNAMENT
Wed, Mar 10-Sun, Mar 14
Nashville, Tenn. | TBA

NCAA TOURNAMENT
Tue, Mar 16 - Mon, Apr 5
Site TBA | TBA



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IT'S ANOTHER PORTAL TURNOVER SEASON

But LSU Women's Coach Returns An All-Star Nucleus

By **KACE KIESCHNICK** | Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

What was once an anomaly is now an annual event in the world of college athletics. A year after rebuilding the LSU roster with five freshmen and three transfers, coach Kim Mulkey welcomes six more newcomers to Baton Rouge – over half of her 11-women roster.

Mulkey said the days of a 15-deep roster with talent coaches recruited out of high school and cultivated for four seasons are long gone. Instead, teams rely on the proven talent they can retain and add playmakers in the transfer portal. It is a strategy that has proven effective for dozens of teams since the transfer portal took over college sports in 2021, but Mulkey said there is no way of knowing what kind of team you have until the season starts.

"Part of that is exciting. Part of that is scary, but at the same time, you got to go coach," Mulkey said.

Luckily for her, four of the five LSU returners averaged over 18 minutes per game last season. Two-time first-team All-Southeastern Conference guard Mikaylah Williams is back for her senior season with something to prove.

Photo by: LSU Athletics

The Tigers' leading scorer last season, guard MiLaysia Fulwiley is ready to build on her first year in Baton Rouge, and guard ZaKiyah Johnson and forward Grace Knox are poised for breakout sophomore campaigns.

Johnson played most of her minutes in the post and earned freshman All-SEC honors after averaging 9.7 points and 5.6 rebounds a game while shooting 59.9 percent from the field. But she has played all over the floor in practice this preseason.

"One minute I'd have her on the wing," Mulkey said. "The next minute I'd have her inside. She's just so athletic that she can do it all, and I expect good things from 'Z' this year."

Williams and Fulwiley will lead the Tigers again after averaging 14.2 and 14.6 points per game each last season, respectively, and Mulkey added veteran transfer portal reinforcements in the backcourt.

Former Iowa State guard Jada Williams will conduct the offense at point guard after an All-Big 12 season in which she averaged 15.3 points, 7.7 assists and 3.5 rebounds per game.

Florida transfer Laila Reynolds was a three-year starter for the Gators and averaged 12.1 points, 3.4 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game last season.

There is also junior Tennessee Tech transfer Chloe Larry, a Bossier City native who shot 35% from three and averaged 12.5 points a game as a Golden Eagle.

With Johnson shifting back to the outside and departures from Amiya Joyner and Kate Koval, the front court around Knox will look very different. Knox played in 33 games last season and started 11, averaging 8.8 points and 4.6 rebounds while shooting a team-high 62.1%.

"She's playing unbelievable right now," Mulkey said.

Alongside Knox is young talent and international flair.

Freshman Lola Lampley is a 6-foot-2 wing who was rated as high as the No. 15 player in the 2026 class, but she will get her minutes in the post this season.

Filling the paint as the Tigers' biggest rim protectors are two former overseas pros, senior Noa Morro (6-foot-3) and freshman Anna Minaeva (6-5).

Morro will miss the start of the season with injury but provides defensive length and offensive spacing with her shooting ability. Minaeva is a versatile playmaker for her size.

"Our perimeter players, if you look at them, all of them have college experience, and then you mix in the post players and you've got new ones. So I think it's going to be challenging in some ways," Mulkey said.

The Tigers take on an SEC schedule loaded as usual.

South Carolina is the preseason favorite with the returns of Joyce Edwards, Tessa Johnson and Chloe Kitts. The Gamecocks also poached star Texas guard Jordan Lee, but the Longhorns will still be a force near the top of the conference with forward Madison Booker.

LSU will contend with the best in the SEC along with a rising Vanderbilt program that finished second in the conference a season ago. TR

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NOW, IT'S MIKAYLAH WILLIAMS' TEAM

LSU Star Guard Is Ready To Leave Lasting Legacy For Louisiana

By **KACE KIESCHNICK** | Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU guard Mikaylah Williams has waited her three seasons, and now she's ready to take over the LSU women's basketball team her senior year. Williams has been a star since she arrived on campus. She started 33 games as a true freshman and was named Southeastern Conference Freshman of the Year.

As a sophomore, she continued her featured role in the offense and earned first-team All-SEC honors.

Last year, she was again named first-team All-SEC, posting her most efficient season as a Tiger despite less minutes and shots.

For all three of those years, though, another upperclassmen star led the team. As a freshman it was Angel Reese. The next year it was Annesah Morrow and Flau'jae Johnson, and last season it was Johnson again with scoring help from MiLaysia Fulwiley.

Kim Mulkey, Mikaylah Williams
Photo by: LSU Athletics

Williams and Fulwiley are the only returning seniors on the 2026-2027 Tigers. It is their turn to lead the charge.

"I'm excited," Williams said. "We have a lot of new players, a lot of young players, but it's a lot of great energy. Everybody's ready to learn. Everybody's bought in. Everybody works extremely hard, and just the culture we have and the team chemistry we have is one of the best I've had since I've been here. So, I'm just excited. I'm ready to lead, and I'm ready to play basketball."

Williams said for her, leading is speaking up and speaking often to help coach Kim Mulkey.

"That's kind of what I really wanted to do is just be an extension of coach Mulkey and speak up and let them hear my voice and then lead by example because if one goes, we all go," she said.

The 6-foot guard has averaged 15.4 points, 4.9 rebounds, 3.3 assists and 1.2 steals per game during her time in Baton Rouge while shooting 47.9 percent from the field and 39.3 percent from three. Despite her individual success and accolades, her LSU career has been far from a fairy tale narrative.

"We know my career, obviously the feeling of having unfinished business will always be there," she said.

That unfinished business comes from a Tigers postseason trend Williams is hoping to help break this season.

When Williams arrived in Baton Rouge in 2023, LSU was, of course, coming off coach Kim Mulkey's fourth and the Tigers' first national championship in the 2022-23 season.

Williams slotted into a team of returning stars and helped them to another deep tournament run that was cut short in the Elite Eight by Caitlin Clark and Iowa. In the 2025 tournament, LSU was again stumped in the Elite Eight.

Last season, Williams spearheaded a miraculous late comeback in the Sweet Sixteen, scoring six-straight points to take the lead in the final seconds versus Duke, but a three-pointer eliminated the Tigers.

If LSU wants to make a deep postseason run, they will need to do it on the backs of their stars. Mulkey has expressed concerns of her team's depth in the name, image and likeness, transfer portal era. That means more minutes for the top of the rotation, and Williams worked all offseason to answer that call.

"I did focus a lot on my body," Williams said. "I think I've always been dieting, but finding the right diet for my body, the weight just slid off. That's kind of where I locked in on, and then obviously I think I have a good work habit. During the summer, I stayed at school. I worked out three, four times a day, just just trying to get in shape, knowing where I want to go after this and knowing where I need to go this season as well."

After a summer in the gym working to take her game to the next level, Williams is ready for her senior season. She has stepped up as a leader for her team on and off the court with big goals in mind, but for the Bossier City native, her LSU career means so much more than what happens on the court. That is why she stayed at her home state school for all four seasons.

"My whole mission was to let all the little girls in Louisiana know that it's possible to make it to the next level," Williams said. "And then that it's possible to stay at one spot and become great." TR





MATCH MADE IN BAYOU HEAVEN

Jada Williams Has Blended In At LSU While Taking Over

By **KACE KIESCHNICK** | Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

Jada Williams and LSU have been a perfect match.

The senior point guard from Kansas City, Missouri, has been a superstar since high school. She was rated as a five-star prospect out of La Jolla Country Day in San Diego, California, and she earned the nickname "Trailblazer" for being one of the first high school athletes in the country to take advantage of Name, Image and Likeness deals.

Jada Williams
Photo by: LSU Athletics

Often described as a social media influencer off the court, she has amassed over 558,000 followers on Instagram, and she wanted to join that brand with one of the most recognizable brands in college sports. A fierce competitor on the court as well, her new team and coaching staff offer her the opportunity to learn from, play with and compete against some of the best in the nation as she strives to achieve her WNBA dreams.

It would be easy to have preconceived notions about what years in the limelight could do to a young star – perhaps ones of selfishness or arrogance – but her style on the hardwood and her leadership off it tell a different story.

"She's a verbal leader," LSU coach Kim Mulkey said. "She talks. She plays with a lot of energy. Her challenge is, 'Who do I throw it to?' Because that's what she wants to do, but the young lady can score as well. She has a true point guard mentality. She's not going to be a game manager where she never shoots, but her goal is probably to average about 10 assists a game."

Williams transferred to LSU from Iowa State after starting her career at Arizona and was rated as the No. 4 portal prospect by ESPN. In her single season as a Cyclone, she was named first team All-Big 12 after averaging 15.3 points, 7.7 assists and 3.5 rebounds a game. Playing next to All-American center Audi Crooks, Williams led the conference and finished third in the country in assists per game. Now, she is bringing her command as floor general to a new group of offensive weapons like MiLaysia Fulwiley and Mikaylah Williams at LSU.

"Playing with her is so much fun, and then playing with somebody that wants to pass the ball, somebody that you have to tell to shoot the ball when they're open because she's always looking for the next pass," Mikaylah Williams said. "I'm extremely excited to play with somebody that's so selfless."

It will not actually be the first time Jada and Mikaylah Williams play together when the pair take the court this season. They were first teammates on the 2022 Under 17 USA Women's Basketball team and helped Team USA to a FIBA U17 Women's World Cup gold medal in Hungary. They also shared the court in the 2023 McDonald's All-American game.

Mikaylah Williams said that Jada Williams's infectious personality and decisive leadership have not changed since high school.

"She's been the same since we first met," Mikaylah said. "She's just like an Energizer Bunny. She always has great energy. She's always talking, always very inclusive, and even on the court, she's always talking, always telling people where to go. She just got here, and she's already learned the system, and she's able to tell everybody where to go. She's able to run her offense."

Running her offense does not mean just passing to the open teammate, although she does that plenty. Williams improved her shooting in her one season at Iowa State, making 41.7 percent of her shots and 30. percent of her threes. She totaled 10 points or more 25 times last season, and Mulkey said she has been trying to get the pass-first point guard to be more selfish.

"I don't want you to not shoot the ball." Mulkey said she told Williams, "You scored 40-some points in a game last year and had over 10 assists. We want you to do that." TR





KIM MULKEY'S TEAMS ARE KNOWN FOR POWERFUL POST PLAY

But Her Tigers This Season Will Be A Little Green In The Paint

By **KACE KIESCHNICK** | Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU coach Kim Mulkey is known for her teams playing exceptionally well in the paint.

She has developed stars like Brittney Griner at Baylor and Angel Reese at LSU, and her LSU teams have never ranked outside of the top three in the Southeastern Conference in rebounds per game.

Before last season's NCAA Tournament, Mulkey reaffirmed the significance of quality front court play.

"A lot of coaches believe it's the guard's time to shine in the postseason, and I go back to thinking about my own career in coaching," she said last year before the NCAA Tournament. "I don't think I've ever won a national championship without great post play."

Grace Knox
Photo by: LSU Athletics

She said that does not mean a post player needs to be the team's top scorer, but she does need frequent touches. On the defensive end, Mulkey said rebounding and second chance points were the difference in her eliminating loss to Duke in the NCAA Tournament last season. And she has consistently emphasized the importance of both.

But look for her 2026-2027 LSU team to be uncharacteristically inexperienced in the front court. Sophomore Grace Knox is the only forward with significant college minutes. Senior Noa Morro is a former Spanish pro, but she will make her NCAA debut this season.

Sophomore Meghan Yarnevich averaged just six minutes per game across 20 outings last season, and Lola Lampley and Anna Minaeva are true freshmen, although Minaeva also has pro experience.

What the Tigers lack in collegiate production, they make up for in talent. Knox and Lampley are former five-star recruits, Yarnevich was a four star, and Morro and Minaeva did not go pro incidentally. There is true star potential, but it may take time to unlock it. With Morro sidelined as she recovers from shin surgery, Mulkey said the freshmen will play right away.

"I'm excited about both of them, but I'm also of the belief that they are going to have sad moments," Mulkey said. "It's our job to make them understand, 'You're okay. You are out here playing against older players, and this is how you get better.'"

At 6-foot-5, Minaeva is LSU's biggest force under the rim, and she has the fundamentals and finesse to go with her size. Mulkey has dubbed her "baby-Jokic," after three-time NBA MVP Nikola Jokic, for her footwork and vision. But the 17-year-old still has a lot of room to grow.

"I don't even know if she's ever lifted a weight until she got over here, but if you separate the body from the face, the body looks older," Mulkey said. "Then you look at her sweet face, and you see a 17-year-old. But her fundamentals and her skill level tell you that young lady is going to be special by the time she finishes college."

Lampley was rated the No. 6 power forward in the country by 247Sports out of Lawrence Central in Indianapolis. A physical defender and capable shooter and ball handler, the McDonald's All-American is 6-2 and has the versatility to play on the wing or inside.

"I'm excited about Lola," Mulkey said. "She comes from a pedigree of mom and dad both being collegiate athletes and darn good athletes. She's got a sibling, an older sister that plays in college. She's got three brothers who are going to be highly recruited college players, so that family understands basketball."

Lampley's sister, Jaylah, is a sophomore at Mississippi State, and her mother helped Purdue to the 1994 Final Four as a player.

Morro's 6-3 size will help her fill LSU's need for rebounding and rim protection when she returns. A 36.5 percent three-point shooter in her most recent EuroLeague action, she will also be an effective spacer for a team filled with interior offensive firepower.

But the front court's success all comes back to Knox. Mulkey raved about her improvement heading into year two.

"The knowledge she now has from having been here a year, that has a lot to do probably with why she's playing so well," she said. "Because she's more confident and knowledgeable of the college game and how we want things done." 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

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SO | 6-3
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SR | 6-3
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CHLOE LARRY
21 | GUARD
JR | 5-6
BOSSIER CITY, LA. | PARKWAY HS
TENNESSEE TECH



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SR | 5-9
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Thu, Oct 29
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Baton Rouge, La., 7:00 PM CT

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vs. SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA
Baton Rouge, La. 6:00 PM CT

Thu, Nov 5
vs. TEXAS SOUTHERN
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Tue, Nov 10
vs. MCNEESE
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Fri, Nov 13
vs. DENVER
Baton Rouge, La. 6:00 PM CT

Mon, Nov 16
vs. TROY
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Thu, Nov 19
vs. FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Mon, Nov 23
vs. BELMONT
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Fri, Nov 27
vs. VILLANOVA
Fort Myers, Fla. 3:30 PM CT

Sat, Nov 28
vs. NC STATE
Fort Myers, Fla. 3:30 PM CT

Wed, Dec 2
at NORTH CAROLINA
Chapel Hill, N.C. 6:15 PM CT

Sun, Dec 6
at NORTHWESTERN STATE
Natchitoches, La. 2:00 PM CT

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vs. HOUSTON
Houston, Texas 12:00 PM CT

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vs. STONEHILL
Baton Rouge, La. 11:00 AM CT

Sun, Dec 20
vs. UCONN
Nashville, Tenn. 12:00 PM CT

Sun, Dec 27
vs. ALCORN STATE
Baton Rouge, La. 2:00 PM CT

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Auburn, Ala. 6:00 PM CT

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Baton Rouge, La.12:00 PM CT

Thu, Jan 7
vs. TEXAS A&M
Baton Rouge, La. 8:00 PM CT

Sun, Jan 10
at FLORIDA
Gainesville, Fla.1:00 PM CT

Thu, Jan 14
vs. MISSISSIPPI STATE
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Sun, Jan 17
at ARKANSAS
Fayetteville, Ark. 1:00 PM CT

Thu, Jan 21
at ALABAMA
Tuscaloosa, Ala. 6:00 PM CT

Thu, Jan 28
vs. AUBURN
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Mon, Feb 1
vs. OLE MISS
Baton Rouge, La. 7:00 PM CT

Thu, Feb 4
at KENTUCKY
Lexington, Ky. 7:00 PM CT

Sun, Feb 7
at MISSOURI
Columbia, Mo. 1:00 PM CT

Thu, Feb 11
vs. TEXAS
Baton Rouge, La. 6:00 PM CT

Sun, Feb 14
vs. GEORGIA
Baton Rouge, La. 2:00 PM CT

Sun, Feb 21
at SOUTH CAROLINA
Columbia, S.C. 2:00 PM CT

Thu, Feb 25
at TENNESSEE
Knoxville, Tenn. 5:00 PM CT

Sun, Feb 28
vs. OKLAHOMA
Baton Rouge, La.1:00 PM CT

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Will Wade
Photo by: LSU Athletics

WILL WADE

Was Up Schitt's Creek Without A Paddle When LSU Fired Him

Then He Went "Up On Cripple Creek" In Lake Charles And Eventually Rowed Back To LSU

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

Say what you want about LSU basketball coach Will Wade.

Most people do.

But Wade knows where he comes from and holds those places dear to his heart tightly:

-Nashville, where he grew up.

-Clemson, where he graduated from college in 2005 and began his coaching career as a graduate assistant.

-McNeese State, which hired him a year after LSU fired him when most schools avoided him.

-And LSU, where he hath returned with a vengeance.

"I know Will. I was here when he was here," Clemson beat writer Larry Williams of On3.com said. "Will was and is a huge Clemson fan. Huge."

When he was Virginia Commonwealth's head coach (2015-17), he'd schedule weekend basketball practices around trips to Clemson for football games.

Wade opened his second term as LSU basketball coach by playing an exhibition game at McNeese Oct. 8 in 4,242-seat Townsley Law Arena in Lake Charles. It sold out with all proceeds going to McNeese's program.

"McNeese, those folks saved my career," Wade said the day before that game to the Baton Rouge Rotary Club at Drusilla's restaurant in Baton Rouge. "I owe everything I have to the people of Lake Charles and to everybody at McNeese."

McNeese and Lake Charles were to Wade what Bessie, Cripple Creek and Lake Charles were to The Band in their 1969 hit, "Up On Cripple Creek."

When I get off of this mountain
You know where I wanna go?
Straight down the Mississippi River
To the Gulf of Mexico
To Lake Charles, Louisiana
Little Bessie, girl that I once knew
And she told me just to come on by
If there's anything she could do

"They stuck their neck out for me when I was down and out and needed somebody to believe in me," Wade said. "And those folks believed in me."

Then-McNeese State athletic director Heath Schroyer, in particular, stuck his neck out. He hired Wade in March of 2023 – a year after his LSU firing and ate the show-cause NCAA penalties.

The NCAA suspended Wade on arrival for his first five games and handed Schroyer a laundry list of do's and don'ts to keep Wade under constant surveillance. But Shroyer gladly rolled the dice.

And Wade made up for all that and much more at McNeese. He led the Cowboys to a 30-4 record and 17-1 Southland Conference title in 2023-24 after 11 straight losing seasons and nine in the SLC over that span. Wade also put McNeese in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2002. And in 2024-25, he went 28-7 with another SLC title at 19-1 and delivered McNeese's first NCAA Tournament win ever – 69-67 over No. 5 seed Clemson – his alma mater as his worlds collided.

It was more than the wins, though. The Lake Charles area, including McNeese's basketball arena, was ravaged by Hurricane Laura in August of 2020.

"It's been a dream season coming off that," McNeese State Foundation board member Billy Rose said in 2024 as McNeese prepped for the Big Dance. "He has done wonderful things that people didn't expect. He's a rock star here. And he loves Lake Charles"

And they welcomed him back on Oct. 8.

"People love him here. He was a rock star then, and he's still a rock star with McNeese fans," Rose said before LSU won the exhibition. "Will Wade has a soft spot in his heart for McNeese and Lake Charles. He gets choked up when he talks about McNeese. He knows McNeese hired him when no one else would."

And Wade made sure Schroyer got a new job at LSU as associate athletic director just three years later when LSU rehired him after a year at North Carolina State.

And now Wade is back with his Bessie – aka LSU.

"This is a great place," he said. "I felt like when we left, we had unfinished business. There's just a whole other level we can reach here. That's why we're back, because I believe that we can win a national championship at LSU. That's the goal." TR

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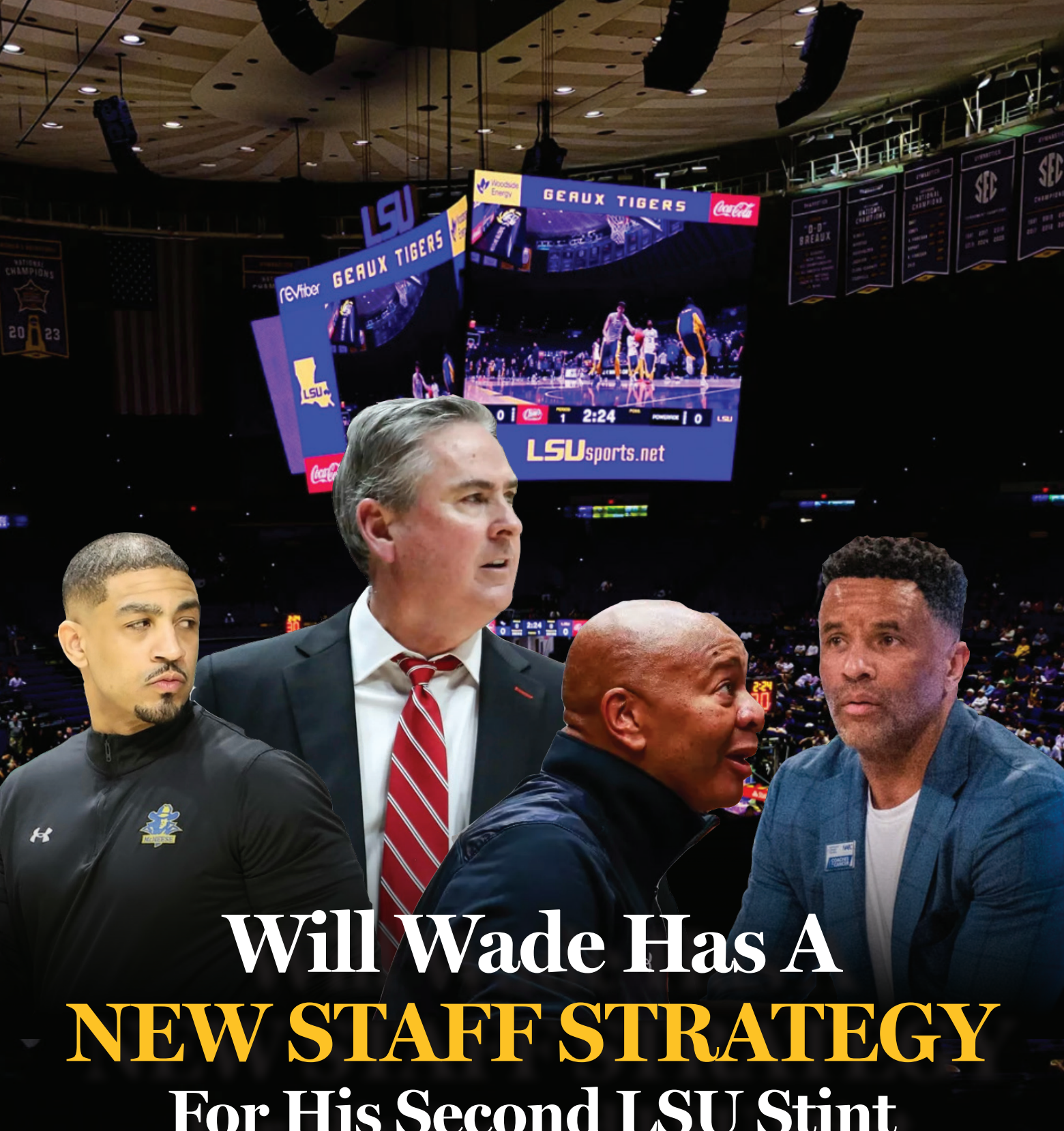
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Will Wade Has A NEW STAFF STRATEGY For His Second LSU Stint

He Plans To Use The Art Of Delegation

By **GLENN GUILBEAU** | Tiger Rag Editor

(Left to Right) Vernon Hamilton, Rick Stansbury, Johnny Jones, Damon Stoudamire
Photo by: LSU Athletics

When Will Wade was a younger coach at LSU from 2017-22, he tended to try to do everything. His young assistants were just that. They assisted.

Not so in his second turn as LSU's basketball coach. Now 43, Wade has gone old school and will delegate and listen as he has hired two assistants who were Southeastern Conference head coaches and a former Atlantic Coast Conference head coach.

His top assistant is associate head coach Rick Stansbury, 66. Stansbury was Mississippi State's head coach from 1998-2012 and head coach at Western Kentucky from 2016-24. Stansbury is considered an expert recruiter of overseas players, and Wade has ventured into that talent depot considerably for his first LSU team second time around.

Stansbury was named SEC Coach of the Year in 2004 after he led State to a 26-4 finish and regular season title, which was the program's first since the 1962-63 season. The Bulldogs' 14-2 league mark in 2004 was the best in school history and included an 8-0 mark in SEC road games. State reached a No. 4 Associated Press ranking and school-best No. 2 NCAA Tournament seeding.

Stansbury won five SEC Western Division titles at State, two SEC Tournament titles in 2002 and 2009. The winningest coach in Mississippi State basketball history with 293 victories that is 11th in SEC history. Stansbury guided 11 Bulldog teams to tournament appearances (6 NCAA, 5 NIT) and took 10 teams to 20-plus-win seasons.

He became the first coach in State basketball history to record four-consecutive 20-win seasons and did so twice – from 2002-05 and from 2007-10. He also established school firsts with five-straight postseason tournament appearances from 2001 through 2005.

Former LSU player Johnny Jones, 66, was on coach Dale Brown's first Final Four team with the Tigers in 1981, and a Brown assistant from 1984-97 when the Tigers reached 10 straight NCAA Tournaments, another Final Four and an Elite Eight.

Jones was LSU's head coach from 2012-17 and took the Tigers to the 2015 NCAA Tournament before finishing with a 22-11 mark and third place finish in the SEC at 11-7. He was Texas Southern's head coach from 2018-26, and coached North Texas from 2001-12.

Former NBA star Damon Stoudamire, 53, is another LSU assistant coach after serving as Georgia Tech's head coach in the ACC from 2023-26 and Pacific's head coach from 2016-21.

Rounding out Wade's staff are assistant coaches Vernon Hamilton, 41, and Mark Hsu, 43. Hamilton previously coached under Wade at LSU from 2020-22, McNeese State from 2023-25 and at North Carolina State last year. Hsu previously coached at DePaul and coached under Stansbury at Western Kentucky.

"My coaching staff is tremendous," Wade said. "That's why you come back to a place like LSU, where you can get resources to hire some of the best coaches in the country. We have great on-court coaches. And there are so many parts to running a program now." TR





Kim Mulkey
Photo by: LSU Athletics

Tapping The Coaching Transfer Portal

Kim Mulkey Had To Rebuild Her Staff As Well As The Roster

By **KACE KIESCHNICK** | Tiger Rag Staff Reporter

LSU coach Kim Mulkey did not just have to replace key departures on her roster. She did the same on her coaching staff as well.a

Assistant coach Gary Redus II left to become Rutgers' new head coach in the offseason after four seasons with the Tigers.

Longtime Mulkey assistant Daphne Mitchell followed him to New Jersey. Mitchell spent six seasons under Mulkey at Baylor, working her way up the ranks to assistant coordinator of recruiting and operations before she became an assistant coach when Mulkey left for LSU.

Redus was known for his role in recruiting and back court development while Mitchell was instrumental in developing the Tigers' dominant post talent. Mulkey filled the two vacant spots in her staff with a pair of former Miami assistant coaches – Fitzroy Anthony and Murriel Page.

Anthony spent the last 11 seasons with the Hurricanes and the last four as associate head coach. He helped the Hurricanes to six NCAA tournament appearances, one trip to the Elite Eight and a 214-132 record.

"Fitzroy Anthony is one of the most well-thought of assistants in the women's basketball game," Mulkey said in the team's announcement of his signing. "His dedication to excellence in all facets of the job will stand out right away, whether it be coaching on the floor or recruiting the best players for LSU. Fitzroy will be a crucial addition to our staff as we continue to build high-level rosters, and his passion and energy for the game and this basketball program will be easy to embrace."

Page comes to LSU with 16 years of experience as a collegiate assistant coach following an 11-season WNBA career. Her coaching career began at her alma mater, Florida, in 2010, and she made stops at Central Michigan, Georgia Tech and Mississippi State before Miami.

"Murriel brings a tremendous wealth of experience to LSU and embodies professionalism in every sense," Mulkey said in the signing announcement. "Our student-athletes will greatly benefit from her perspective as both a player and coach at the highest levels of the game. Her experience with the Canadian national team adds an invaluable dimension, and she is highly respected on the recruiting trail. We're thrilled to welcome her to LSU."

Anthony and Murriel help replace the recruiting and coaching pedigree lost with Redus and Mitchell, and they join three returning coaches to round out Mulkey's 2026-2027 staff.

Associate head coach Bob Starkey is back for his fifth season in his latest return to LSU. He previously helped the Lady Tigers to five Final Four appearances and served stints with the men's and women's teams from 1989-2011. He has coached stars like Shaquille O'Neal, Seimone Augustus and Sylvia Fowles and is known for developing exceptional post talent and stifling defenses.

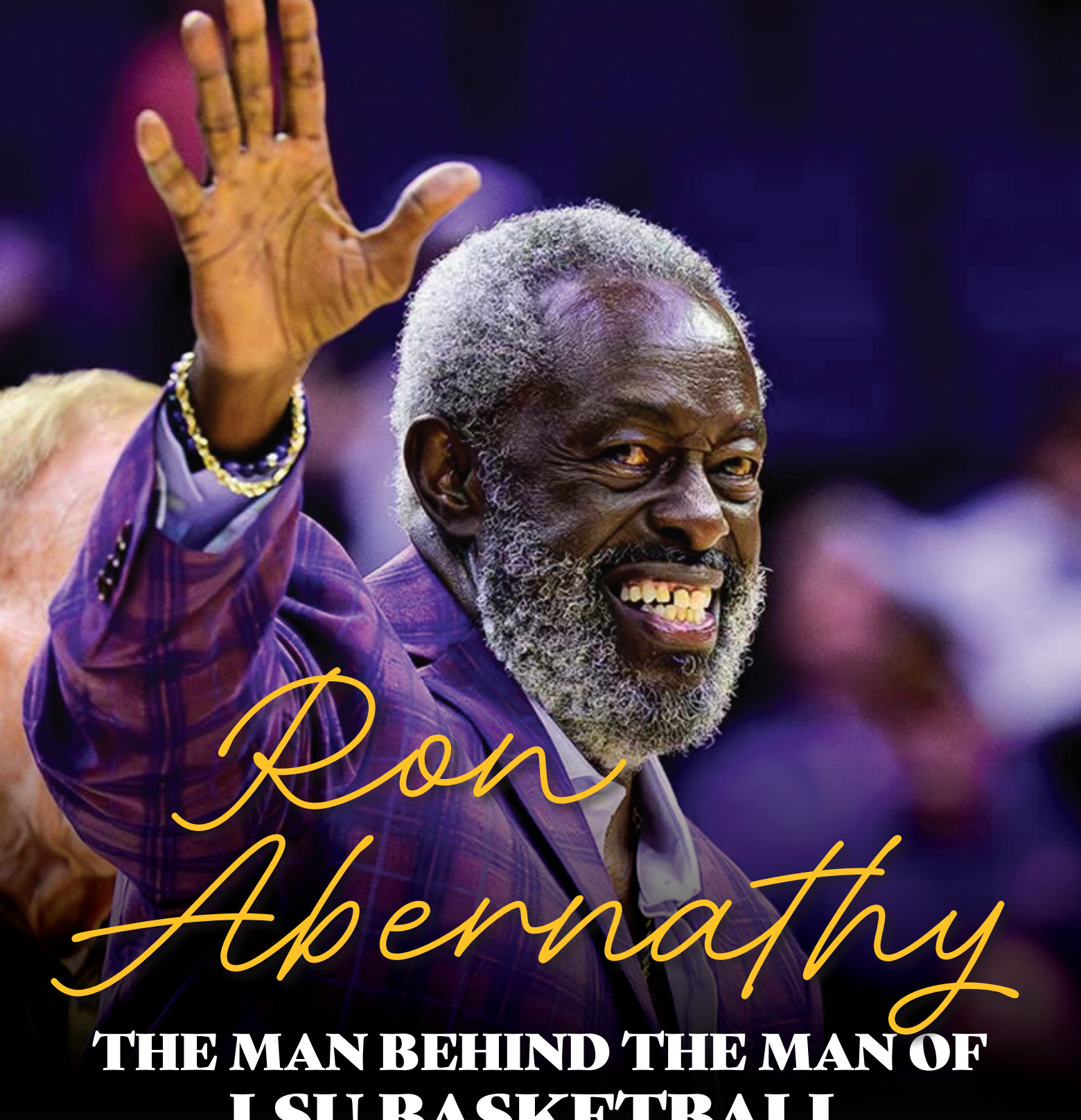
Augustus joins her former coach for her third season as an assistant with the Tigers. One of the most impactful players in LSU and SEC history, she was a four-time All-American, the top overall pick in the 2006 WNBA Draft and a Naismith Basketball Hall of Famer. Now, she is passing down her expertise as a prolific scorer, ball handler and playmaker to the next generation of LSU stars.

The final spot on the staff belongs to assistant coach and director of recruiting Kaylin Rice. Rice spent 10 seasons working under Mulkey in different roles at Baylor before following her to LSU in 2021. In addition to coordinating recruiting efforts, Rice leads the "Dream Team," the all-male squad of LSU students whom the Lady Tigers practice against. She has helped welcome two top-rated recruiting classes in her five seasons at LSU.

Mulkey and her staff will work to lead the Tigers to their sixth straight NCAA Tournament and fifth straight trip to at least the Sweet 16.

They will need to help integrate veteran transfers and develop newcomers that will see significant minutes in their first year of collegiate action as LSU faces a deep Southeastern Conference and jam-packed non-conference schedule. TR





Ron Abernathy

THE MAN BEHIND THE MAN OF LSU BASKETBALL

By **GLENN GUILBEAU**
Tiger Rag Editor

In Memoriam

Ron Abernathy | Photo by: LSU Athletics

Ron Abernathy, the man behind the man of LSU basketball's storied history of the 1970s-80s under coach Dale Brown who signed Shaquille O'Neal and recruited key members of LSU's 1981 Final Four team hailed as greatest in school history, died on June 24.

Abernathy died at age 75 in Jackson, Tennessee, of cancer. He is survived by his wife Sharon, son Ron Jr. and daughter Charity.

A native of Louisville who was born on Dec. 13, 1950, Abernathy played basketball at and graduated from Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky.

When Brown hired Abernathy in 1976 from Shawnee High in Louisville, Abernathy became the first African-American assistant coach in LSU athletics history.

Abernathy was one of Brown's top assistant coaches from 1976-89 – an era that featured the Tigers' rise to national prominence after mostly poor seasons from 1954-55 through 1968-69 before Pistol Pete Maravich's senior year in 1969-70 when LSU (22-10, 13-5 SEC runner-up) reached the then-prestigious NIT in Madison Square Garden.

"Ron Abernathy couldn't have been a nicer guy," Brown said. "Just a perpetual smile on his face. He was such a great recruiter for us. He dressed so well that he made me feel like a hobo. The kids loved him and loved playing for him."

Brown, who turns 91 on Halloween, took over in the 1972-73 season. With Abernathy at his side, Brown led LSU to its first SEC title and NCAA Tournament since 1954 in 1979. An Elite Eight and the Tigers' last SEC Tournament title followed in 1980 before the school's first Final Four since 1953 in 1981. LSU finished 31-5 overall and 17-1 for another SEC regular season crown that year.

The Tigers won the SEC regular season title again in 1985 with Abernathy and Brown and returned to the Final Four in 1986 and the Elite Eight in 1987. They went to seven straight NCAA Tournaments with players recruited by Abernathy from 1984-90. Brown went three more times for a school record 10 NCAA Tournaments after Abernathy with players Abernathy recruited.

Abernathy coached one of LSU's greatest players in history in forward Rudy Macklin at Shawnee High in Louisville, where Abernathy was 97-11 from 1972-76. Brown recruited Macklin away from Louisville coach Denny Crum and brought Abernathy with him to LSU.

From 1976-81, Macklin became LSU's first star since Maravich, leading the Tigers to SEC titles in 1979 and '81 and that Final Four. Macklin was a rare three-time first team All-SEC player, the SEC Player of the Year and All-American in 1981.

Two years after becoming freshman coach at Shawnee, Abernathy replaced legendary James "Honey Bee" Gordon as head coach.

"The first thing out of his mouth was, 'Nothing's changed. Go to class. Be at practice on time. And we're going to run laps,'" Macklin remembers Abernathy saying. "He worked us to death. We ran like crazy."

When Brown signed Macklin away from Louisville, Tennessee, UCLA, Maryland and Marquette, he then got Abernathy, too.

"He was a great high school coach," Brown said. "And I was impressed with him – wanted him to work for me. He was only 25 at the time."

Once at LSU, Abernathy recruited forward DeWayne Scales (1977-80 at LSU) from Dallas, sixth man sensation guard Willie Sims (1977-81) from Long Island, New York, point guard Ethan Martin (1977-81) from McKinley High in Baton Rouge, guard Johnny Jones (1980-84) from DeRidder, and forward Leonard Mitchell (1980-84) from St. Martinville. Abernathy often slept in his car outside Mitchell's home, guarding him from national recruiters.

With guard Jordy Hultberg (1976-80) from De La Salle in New Orleans, Howard Carter (1979-83) from Redemptorist in Baton Rouge and center Greg Cook (1976-81) from Newark, New Jersey, LSU had its greatest three-year run in history from 1978-79 through 1980-81.

Abernathy was still coaching just last spring at Humboldt High in Humboldt, Tennessee and reached the Class IA championship game, finishing 23-7. After the season he retired following 12 seasons at Humboldt, including a state final and 30-4 finish in 2019 when Abernathy was named coach of the year.

He returned to Baton Rouge for the 40-year anniversary of LSU's 1986 Final Four team at Drago's restaurant last spring and reunited with Brown.

"I loved my time at LSU," Abernathy said at the reunion. "We had it going for a lot of years – a lot of great teams with coach Brown."

After the 1988-89 season at LSU, Abernathy left to become coach at Tennessee State, but not before he helped Brown sign a 7-foot-1 center named Shaquille O'Neal from Cole High in San Antonio before the 1989-90 season.

After two seasons at Tennessee State, Abernathy had a series of jobs in and out of coaching before landing his in 2014 at Humboldt High.

"I just love coaching basketball," Abernathy said.

"He didn't want to stop coaching," Macklin said. "He loved it."

Abernathy is the sixth assistant coach of Dale Brown at LSU to pass away – Jack Schalow (1972-74 at LSU) and Rick Huckabay (1980-83 at LSU) in 2006, Art Tolis (1974-80 at LSU) in 2010, Bob Boyd (1996-97 at LSU) in 2015, Tex Winter (1983-84 at LSU) in 2018 and Ron Abernathy (1976-89 at LSU) in 2026.

"I'm just really sad," Brown said. "I've lost so many coaches. It's just the brevity of life." TR



NO. 50 Bob Pettit

LSU'S 1ST ATHLETE TO HAVE JERSEY RETIRED

Baton Rouge's Own Was On LSU's 1st Final Four Team And Became The 1st NBA MVP

By GLENN GUILBEAU
Tiger Rag Editor

In Memoriam

Bob Pettit | Photo by: LSU Athletics

METAIRIE – His son, Robert Pettit III, said his father was just one of the dads – albeit a 6-foot-9 pop who happened to be one of the greatest NBA and Southeastern Conference players of all time. And the first LSU athlete in any sport to have his number retired.

Robert Lee Pettit Jr, an NBA All-Star in every season he played for the Milwaukee (one season) and St. Louis Hawks (10 seasons) from 1955-66 and an NBA champion with St. Louis in 1958, was remembered on Oct. 2 at his St. Martin's Episcopal Church in the heart of Old Metairie.

And remembered more as a devoted family man than the powerful, yet artful forward/center Bob Pettit who dominated the NBA for 11 seasons.

He died on Sept. 23 in Metairie at age 93.

"All he was to me was my father," Robert Pettit III said in a frequently tearful eulogy. "He was described as humble, a southern gentleman and a gentle giant. And he truly was. He would suggest the right thing for me to do in situations. He wouldn't just tell me what to do. In my mind, he was the perfect person."

Robert Pettit III said he recalled being at a function as a kid with other kids, who were asked to get up and talk about their fathers.

"I remember saying that dad never once raised his voice to me, and everything got quiet," he said.

Bob Pettit literally spoke softly and carried a big frame throughout his life as an investment banker in New Orleans and before that at LSU and as he became the first in NBA history to score 20,000 points. He retired as the NBA's all-time leading scorer in 1965 with 20,880 points and a 26.4-point average. He also left the game as the NBA's No. 1 rebounder with 12,849. His 16.2 rebounding average per game remains higher than anyone's, other than the NBA's top two rebounders of all time – Wilt Chamberlain (23,924) from 1959-73 with 22.9 a game and Bill Russell (21,620) from 1956-69 at 22.5 a game.

LSU's Shaquille O'Neal finished with 13,099 rebounds from 1992-2011, but with a 10.9 average.

Pettit settled in New Orleans with his family and at one time lived on Cleveland Place in Metairie on Lake Ponchartrain as a neighbor of Pistol Pete Maravich, who remains the No. 1 scorer in men's basketball history with 3,667 points while at LSU (1967-70). Maravich played for the NBA New Orleans Jazz from 1974-79 with Pettit often attending games at the Superdome. He later frequently attended New Orleans Pelicans games at the Smoothie King Center in recent years.

Pettit, O'Neal and Maravich are all immortalized with statues outside the Pete Maravich Assembly Center.

"He was never boastful about all his athletic accomplishments," said Reverend Dr. Fred Devall, the rector at St. Martin's, in the sermon at the mass celebrating Pettit's life.

And there were many.

-Pettit won NBA Rookie of the Year in 1955 after being selected second in the 1954 NBA Draft by the Milwaukee Hawks behind Frank Selvy.

-He was the first NBA MVP in 1956 and won it again in 1959.

-Pettit is one of only two players named MVP of the NBA All-Star game four times along with Kobe Bryant.

-He is one of only four players named to all four NBA Anniversary teams in 1971 (25th), 1980 (35th), 1996 (50th) and 2021 (75th) with Bob Cousy, George Mikan and Bill Russell.

-In an 11-year NBA career, he played in 11 All-Star games.

-Pettit was the first LSU athlete from any sport to have his jersey retired, which was No. 50 after his senior season of 1953-54.

-He was the star of LSU's first Final Four team in 1953.

-Pettit led LSU to its only back-to-back Southeastern Conference regular season championships in 1953 and '54.

-He led the SEC in scoring all three seasons of his varsity career at LSU with 25.5, 24.7 and 31.4 points.

-Pettit's 1,916 points remains sixth all-time at LSU and is 1,039 career rebounds is fourth.

"But I do remember at this 90th birthday party (Dec. 12, 2022) when he was walking with a cane," Devall said. "And he stopped for a second as he passed a large blow-up picture of himself playing against Russell."

That was a picture from the 1958 NBA Finals when Pettit and the St. Louis Hawks beat Russell and the Boston Celtics, 110-109, on April 12, 1958, at Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis for the title in Game 6.

"Bob put his cane on the picture, tapped it a few times and said, 'Dropped 50 that night.' And he walked off," Devall said.

That was as close to a boast as you could hear from Gentleman Bob.

That was 50 points on Boston center Bill Russell. Yes, Pettit scored his LSU number. It was an NBA record for most points in a final game that Pettit held alone until July 20, 2021. That night, 6-11 Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks tied it with 50 in a 105-98 win over Phoenix in Game 6 for the title.

"As great as he was, he was always better under pressure," Russell said years later.

Russell had won eight straight titles with the Celtics, including a title after seven games over Pettit and the Hawks in 1957, before that loss to Pettit and the Hawks. Pettit would reach two more NBA Finals in 1960 and '61, but lost to Boston and Russell each time. Russell won an NBA record 11 titles in 13 seasons with the Celtics. His only finals loss was to Pettit in 1958. And the Hawks have never been to the finals again.

Russell later said that Pettit was the only white man who he ever saw address Russell's parents with sir and mam.

Pettit grew up in Baton Rouge and went to Dufrocq Elementary School before becoming a star basketball player at Baton Rouge High and then LSU.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 46 years, Carole Crowell Pettit, his father, Robert Lee Pettit Sr and his mother, Margaret Brandon Pettit.

Pettit is survived by his three children with wife Carole Crowell Pettit – Peyton Pettit Coates (Jonathon) of Tibbie, Alabama, Robert Lee Pettit III (Conway) of Baton Rouge, Mary Pettit Mozingo (Michael) of Baton Rouge – and his 10 grandchildren: Bobby Pettit, Crossland Pettit, Lucy Jane Pettit, Charlie Pettit, Leven Greene, Lydia Greene, LR Greene, Deacon Mozingo, Camille Mozingo, and Mason Mozingo.

He is also survived by his second wife, Alma Slatten Pettit. Pettit was also preceded in death by his step-son, Bill Slatten (Jane) and survived by two stepchildren, Scott Slatten (Becky) and Elizabeth Healy (Dunbar), and nine step-grandchildren.



Photos by: LSU Athletics

Seven of the grandchildren – Lydia Greene, Mason Mozingo, LR Greene, Camille Mozingo, Lucy Pettit, Crossland Pettit and Charlie Pettit each read a short prayer during the funeral ceremony.

LSU basketball head coach Will Wade, former LSU head basketball coaches John Brady and Johnny Jones (now a Wade assistant) and LSU basketball sports information director Kent Lowe attended the ceremony.

"Bob came with us on several road trips," said Brady, the last LSU coach to reach the Final Four (2006) who was coach from 1997-2008, played golf with Pettit in New Orleans usually right after each season.

"Just a great person to be around," Brady said.

Before Maravich and players brought to LSU by coach Dale Brown (1972-97), such as Rudy Macklin, Chris Jackson and Shaq, Pettit was synonymous with LSU Basketball.

"He was the giant of LSU basketball before Pete and Shaq," former Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne said. "Bob Pettit was LSU basketball. And such a gentleman. Just a model athlete and former athlete."

After his playing days, Pettit worked in the banking industry in Baton Rouge briefly before making New Orleans his permanent home and becoming a financial consultant. He retired from Equitas Capital in 2006 and remained in the New Orleans area, other than a brief move to Baton Rouge after Katrina in 2005.

The second statue erected behind the Maravich Assembly Center was Pettit's in 2016, right next to O'Neal's, which went up in 2011. The Maravich statue went up in 2022, followed by Seimone Augustus in 2023.

"I really appreciate it," Pettit said at the statue ceremony. "It's just hard to realize at this time how significant that is in my life. I've had quite a few honors over the years, but I don't think there's really anything that compares to this."

Not bad for a guy cut from the Baton Rouge High basketball team as a freshman and sophomore before a growth spurt going into his junior year when he made the team.

"I never dreamed in my wildest dreams that something like this would happen," he said at the foot of the statue. "I have found in my life, as you start something, you set a goal for yourself. You reach that, then you ratchet it up. But from down here, you never realize where you're going. When I got cut from the high school team, my ambition was to win a letter by the time I was a senior. That's all I wanted. And here I am with a statue next to Shaq. I'm very flattered. Did I ever dream it? No."

He did so much more than letter.

"What a man," his son Robert said. "He was the most kind, humble and gentle soul. We were so blessed to have him in our lives, and we will miss him dearly. What a father. What a life." TR

Photo by: LSU Athletics



In Memoriam



ORIGINAL LSU FINAL FOUR STAR Ned Clark PASSED AWAY LAST MARCH

Clark And Teammate Bob Pettit Remained Friends From Baton Rouge High Days On

By **GLENN GUILBEAU**
Tiger Rag Editor

In Memoriam

Ned Clark, Bob Pettit | Photo by: LSU Athletics

One of the stars of LSU first Final Four team in 1953, Ned Clark of Baton Rouge, passed away on March 16 at the age of 92.

Clark was a familiar sight near center court at the Pete Maravich Assembly Center for home men's basketball games for decades.

One of Clark's last major appearances at the PMAC came in 2023 when he celebrated the 70th anniversary of the 1953 Tigers with his teammates, including All-American center and two-time NBA MVP Bob Pettit. Teammates at Baton Rouge High and LSU, they remained friends throughout their lives, often going to LSU basketball games.

They remain No. 1 and 2 in LSU's record book for rebounds per season with Pettit No. 1 at 17.2 in 25 games in the 1953-54 season and Clark No. 2 at 15.8 in 24 games in the 1954-55 season.

Clark, a 6-foot-5 forward, got into banking after LSU as did Pettit. Clark graduated from LSU in 1955 and is a former U.S. Air Force captain. He also played on the LSU baseball team. Clark was honored as the school's SEC Basketball Legend in 2010 at the SEC Tournament.

"One of the significant things about our Final Four team was that we had three starters who were from the Baton Rouge area, which was pretty unique," Clark said his playing days.

Those three were Clark, Pettit and Norman Magee, who was from Port Allen – just across the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge.

The 1953 Tigers finished 22-3 (13-0 SEC) and sixth in the polls. In the NCAA Tournament, they beat Lebanon Valley and Holy Cross before losing to Indiana, 80-67, in a national semifinal at the Final Four in Kansas City.

The Tigers reached the Final Four despite Pettit missing six games with pneumonia. LSU won all six, partly because of Clark, who averaged 9.3 points and 9.8 rebounds a game that season.

"Every person reached down and played a little bit better," Clark said. "That strengthened our team."

Clark and Pettit were on the only LSU basketball teams to win back-to-back SEC regular season titles in 1953 and '54.

Clark also had a hand in LSU basketball history long after his playing career as he was on the search committee that hired Washington State assistant Dale Brown as head coach in 1972. Brown took LSU to its next Final Fours in 1981 and '86 and coached 25 years, winning four SEC regular season titles and LSU's last SEC Tournament title in 1980.

Clark's banking career spanned 55 years and included launching two banks.

Clark was survived by his wife of 69 years, Laura O'Lenic Clark; daughters, Bryan Clark Fox (Ray) and Chrissie Clark Olsson (Don); son, EM Ned Clark, Jr. (Stacey); grandchildren, Harrison Fox (Megan), Hayden Fox, Bryan Olsson, Clark Olsson, Collyn Clark Stramwasser (Cristian), Matthew Clark (Caroline) and Camille Clark Theriot (Henri); and great-grandchildren, Tessa Clark, Sophie Stramwasser, Preston Stramwasser, Duke Clark, Millie Fox and Frankie Fox. TR





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College Sports Have Gone Pro. The SEC and Big Ten Should Lead What Comes Next



Todd Horne
Vice President / Executive Editor

Kansas has added a basketball player who exhausted his college eligibility, was selected in the NBA Draft and participated in NBA Summer League. The NCAA considered his eligibility finished. An Indiana judge disagreed, at least temporarily.

Trey Kaufman-Renn, a former Purdue standout, obtained a preliminary injunction allowing him to pursue another season of college basketball. Kansas promptly enrolled him and welcomed him onto the practice floor.

Meanwhile, LSU basketball coach Will Wade recruited former St. John's star RJ Luis Jr., who signed an NBA contract before attempting to return to college basketball. The Southeastern Conference ruled Luis ineligible. Wade ultimately accepted the conference's decision.

Two major basketball programs. Two accomplished players. Two different outcomes.

And one increasingly difficult question: Who is actually governing college athletics?

College football and basketball are professional sports. They've been moving in that direction for decades, but the transformation is now unmistakable. The athletes are paid, the coaches manage multimillion-dollar rosters, agents negotiate compensation, and universities compete for talent in a marketplace resembling professional free agency.

Television networks distribute billions to conferences whose expansion decisions increasingly reflect financial considerations rather than geography or traditional rivalries.

Yet these enterprises remain governed by an organization whose authority was established when amateurism was supposedly the defining principle of college competition.

That model no longer fits.

The NCAA's difficulties didn't begin with name, image and likeness compensation. They accumulated over decades as the financial value of college athletics grew while restrictions on the athletes producing that value remained largely intact.

The Supreme Court's 2021 decision in NCAA v. Alston exposed the vulnerability of NCAA compensation restrictions. Subsequent litigation and the House settlement accelerated the transformation, establishing a framework for universities to share revenue directly with athletes.

The NCAA still conducts championships and maintains eligibility regulations. But its ability to enforce those regulations consistently is increasingly challenged in court.

Kaufman-Renn's situation illustrates the problem.

Kansas can prepare for the season with a player whose eligibility remains the subject of litigation. LSU, facing a different eligibility question involving Luis, accepted the SEC's determination rather than pursue a legal challenge.

Neither school's decision is necessarily improper. Both are operating within the rules and legal circumstances confronting them.

But a national competition cannot function indefinitely when eligibility depends upon which restrictions are challenged, where lawsuits are filed and what individual judges decide.

The solution isn't another NCAA committee, another temporary waiver or another round of litigation.

It's a different governing structure.

The Southeastern Conference and Big Ten should begin the process of separating their major football and basketball operations from the NCAA and establishing a professional Super League.

Now.

These conferences already possess the television audiences, institutional resources, national brands and financial leverage necessary to organize a modern professional competition.

They should use that position to establish clear eligibility standards, enforceable player contracts, negotiated compensation structures, defined transfer periods and consistent roster regulations.

They should also establish a legitimate labor framework that protects athletes' rights while allowing participating institutions to negotiate rules capable of surviving judicial scrutiny.

A Super League cannot simply reproduce the NCAA's legal vulnerabilities under a different name. It must recognize that athletes are economic participants whose interests deserve representation in the decisions governing their careers.

There are considerable obstacles. Federal antitrust law, employment classification, existing television agreements and the future of schools outside the new structure require serious negotiations.

But those questions aren't going away. Neither are the economic forces that created them.

The SEC and Big Ten have spent years consolidating the most valuable brands in college athletics. They have expanded their geographic reach, strengthened their television positions and increased their influence over the postseason.

The financial structure of a professional league is already taking shape. What's missing is governance that reflects it.

Traditionalists will argue that such a separation would destroy college athletics.

I disagree.

LSU can still play Alabama in Tiger Stadium on Saturday night. Kim Mulkey can still pursue national championships in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center. Students can still wear their school colors, bands can still play, and generations of alumni can still care passionately about their universities.

Professional governance doesn't require sacrificing any of that.

What threatens those traditions is allowing an increasingly unstable system to determine the future of sports that universities and their supporters have spent generations building.

And the separation between major athletic programs and smaller institutions already exists. LSU, Alabama, Texas, Ohio State and Michigan operate in a financial environment far removed from universities struggling to support their athletic departments.

Pretending those schools compete under comparable economic circumstances doesn't create fairness.

The NCAA served an important purpose in a different era. But college athletics has changed, and its governing structure must change with it.

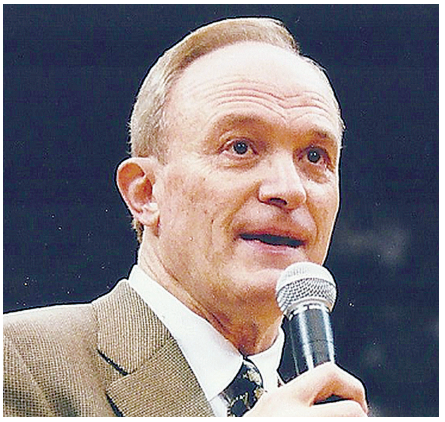
The SEC and Big Ten have the resources and influence to lead that transition. They should stop waiting for someone else to provide the answer.

College football and basketball have already become professional sports.

It's time the institutions profiting from them took responsibility for governing them that way.

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

What My Mentors Taught Me About Winning at Life



Dale Brown
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

My Mom's Effect on Me: Two days before I was born, my so-called father—I've always referred to him as "my mother's husband"—left my mother, two young sisters, eleven and twelve years of age, and me, and he never returned. His departure put my mother in a difficult position. She had an eighth-grade education, came off the farm in North Dakota, and couldn't get a job during the Great Depression in 1935. In the cold prairies of North Dakota, she had to do several things that were very unpleasant for her: she became a baby-sitter, cleaned people's homes, and she had to put our family on welfare. We lived in a one-room apartment above a bar and hardware store, and I remember my mother getting a monthly check, of $42.50 from Ward County Welfare. She sat down and meticulously decided what food she could buy for the coming week.

Two times during these difficult times, my mother taught me a lesson that has stayed with me during my entire life. I saw my mother put on her winter coat, walk down a flight of stairs, and take back to the Red Owl and the Piggly Wiggly grocery stores 25 cents and 40 cents, because the clerks had given her too much change for the groceries she'd brought home. Her actions reminds me of a poem by Edgar Guest.

I'd rather see a lesson than hear one any day.

I'd rather you walk with me than to merely show the way.

The eye is a better teacher, and more willing than the ear.

And counsel is confusing but example's always clear.

The best of all the teachers are the ones who live the creed.

To see good put into action is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it if you let me see it done.

I can see your hand in action, but your tongue too fast may run.

And the counsel you are giving may be very fine and true, But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do.

My mother followed the advise of St. Francis of Assisi: in the 13th century when he said, "Preach the gospel every day, and if necessary use words." I saw other lessons in the life of this special woman.

Not once, did I hear my mother talk negatively about the man who had walked out on us and never returned, never sent any money, never wrote. She didn't drink, smoke, swear, speak badly about anyone, or ever date anyone. She was never bitter, angry, or ever complained about her situation in life.

My mother's Catholic faith was unbelievable. She brought me to Mass and Communion daily—not just Sunday, but daily. For me, the daily trip to church was a ritual. To my numerous fake illnesses and attempts to avoid going, my mom's response was always, "Get up, Son. We're going to Mass and Communion." The spirit that grew in that little, one-room apartment we lived in, uncomfortable and cramped though it was, made it attractive.

Being a small place, the apartment never provided any place for me to get away on my own. So at night, I often went to sit above the alley on the fire escape. One night, the faith my mother instilled in me deepened when I came back in from sitting out there. My mom asked me to sit in her little rocker. She pulled up the footstool and said, "I am embarrassed to tell you this but it is something you should know. When the people come to pick me up to go baby-sit, I am so embarrassed about our situation that I look up big words in the dictionary, and then all the way to their house, I inject these big words into conversation to try to impress them. That's called making an image. When you sit out there on the fire escape at night, just you and God, that's your true character.

If you spend too much time polishing your image, you'll eventually tarnish your character and be an unhappy man." That night, my mom taught me that being my true self was far more important than trying to impress people or pretend to be someone I was not.

Your character is who you really are and your image is what you are perceived to be.

The Church's Effect on Me

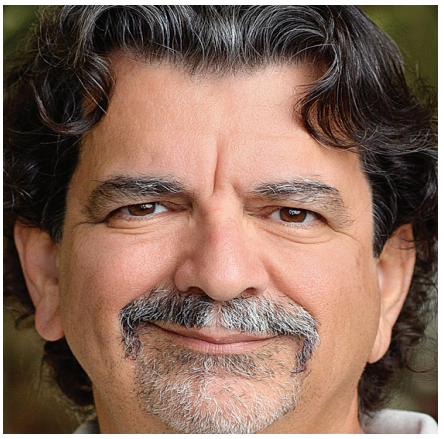
No matter how financially tight things got around the house, Mom always scraped together enough money for me to attend Catholic school. I learned a great deal over the course of the twelve years I was in a Catholic school.

I learned that rules were important and we all are on this earth to help each other.

Two particular lessons I learned stand out profoundly in my mind. One morning, I was standing with two friends by the radiators in the hall at school, warming up. We had religion class before school every day at 8:00 a.m., and we were out there before class, talking about the things kids talk about. One of the guys said, "Yeah, the Salvation Army, isn't that funny what they do? You know, [handwritten words unclear] outside ringing the bell, and they've got that little red pot." Not really making fun of the Salvation Army, but sort of jesting, like kids do. Well, the bell rang, so we went to religion class.

KLEINPETER DIARY

Kim Mulkey's Magic Touch



Jim Kleinpeter
Tiger Rag Featured Columnist

Kim Mulkey's magic touch looked like it was working again. Her 2025-06 team full of new faces started strong against a weak non-conference schedule and played its best basketball down the stretch.

The Tigers were 2.6 seconds away for a third trip to a third consecutive trip to the Elite Eight on top of the 2023 national title she delivered earlier than expected.

It took less than two seconds in elapsed time for the 3-point attempt by the Blue Devils' Ashlon Jackson to go from hand to basket. It wiped out a determined 11-point comeback and send the Tigers home.

And how it's the time of year where LSU can pick up where it left off.

Not so fast.

Even while the Tigers return the core of last year's team, it's a decidedly different roster in search of the program's second national title and the fifth for Mulkey, a decidedly thinner roster.

The Tigers are going from one of the deepest teams in the nation to one that will have to survive with a skeletal roster of 11 players thanks to five portal defections.

While Mulkey is famous for playing no more than nine players on a regular basis, 11 is still dangerously lean. That's the portal age for you, it giveth and taketh away.

Four-year starter Flau'jae Johnson was an expected loss but then Jada Richard entered the portal for a better deal at Ole Miss despite developing into a solid point guard who could score and spread the ball around. And then in a quasi-international incident, Ukrainian forward Kate Koval took a late exit when Mulkey signed a 17-year Russian phenom Anna Minaeva in August.

And one last bit of bad news came when Mulkey announced senior transfer Noa Morro would be out until late November after surgery on a stress fracture in her shin.

Instead of bringing her strong freshman class along slowly, the young players will have to take their lumps early. It's especially dire in the front count because of Morro's unavailability. Mulkey was hoping to play sophomore ZaKiya Johnson more on the wing than down low where she filled a need last season.

Grace Knox had a solid freshman season at forward but the only other bodies there are freshman Lola Lampley is seldom used sophomore Meghan Yarnevich. Even with Morro in the fold, LSU will be an injury away from a major crisis and fans can expect a lot of small lineups.

"I'm excited about both of them," Mulkey said, "but I am also of the belief that they are going to have sad moments. And it's our job to make them understand, you're OK, you're out here playing against older players, and this is how you get better.

"They're gonna be thrown to the wolves. They're gonna be out there, and they're gonna have great moments, and they're gonna have not-so-great moments. They have to play because of depth. With the portal and NIL, it's really hard now to have 15 players on the team. It's hard to have depth now because of money issues."

The good news is the Tigers have one of the best guard tandems in the SEC with seniors Mikaylah Williams and MiLaysia Fulwiley. Williams at times was the team's best player last year and showed improvement but will have to become the leader. Fulwiley would be more stable after transferring from South Carolina before last season.

"I think, for me," Williams said, "leading this team would be having to speak up and speak often.

"Everybody's ready to learn," she said. "Everybody's bought in. Everybody works extremely hard. And just the culture we have and the team chemistry we have is one of the best I've had since I've been here.

A third addition, senior Iowa State transfer Jada Williams was brought in to replace Richard and probably will team with Fulwiley at point guard. This group will be the team's strength and will be asked to play a lot of minutes with transfers Laila Reynolds and Chloe Larry in reserve.

The Tigers set scoring records a plenty last year but will need a little luck with injuries and maybe a lot more magic from coach Kim Mulkey.

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.



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Jim Engster
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Nation Awaits Wade LSU Comeback

Will Wade returns to the PMAC as LSU basketball maestro as the prodigal son of college hoops. His hiring comes four years removed from a firing squad amid a treacherous NCAA probe of infractions. Revelations about Wade's program shocked the most cynical observers of old under the table shenanigans.

Wade is back with a new lease on life. Yet he reigns as a poster boy for bending rules to win championships. In his second season at Tiger-Town in 2019, Wade's crew won the SEC with a 15-2 record, best conference ledger for the Bengals since the 1981 league record of 17-1.

Then the FBI and NCAA started snooping and found enough fodder for Wade to be suspended from postseason duties. He was engulfed by a dark cloud in the three seasons of purgatory and produced a mark of 32-21 in the final three years of his first foray in Baton Rouge.

Wade continued his winning ways at McNeese and North Carolina State before a union of LSU luminaries and Gov. Jeff Landry courted him to return to the land of his great triumph and grave failure.

It is hard to return home as Paul Dietzel learned when he was fired as athletic director in 1982, the year of Wade's birth. But this coach is young at 44 with a budget that rivals the money expended to feed the basketball factory at Lexington, KY.

No longer does a coach have to build a program as Dale Brown did when he set up shop at the Assembly Center in 1972. It took six years before Brown lifted his team to the No. 2 slot in the league. One season later, LSU won its first SEC title in 25 years.

The Brown Bunch attracted players from here, there and everywhere with foreign imports coupled with top stars from cities like Los Angeles, San Antoinio, Louisville, New York, Miami, Dallas, Jackson and Gulfport.

Brown's bedrock was always Louisiana which provided his program with the likes of Howard Carter, Ethan Martin, Leonard Mitchell, Don Redden, Derrick Taylor, Anthony Wilson, Jordy Hultberg, Lionel Green, John Tudor, Randy Livingston and Collis Temple.

Wade's current roster is the oldest and least Louisiana laden in LSU history. It is a new trajectory in college athletics, and Wade appears comfortable with the uncertain terrain. It will be a significant story no matter how things turn out for a coach who is viewed as a gifted but flawed work in progress. Sounds familiar.

A Year of Lost Legends

LSU lost **Skip Bertman** and **Jerry Stovall** 17 days apart this August. They rank as two of the most influential members of the rich Tiger athletic legacy.

Bertman won five national titles on the diamond after inheriting a program that was secondary to spring football for a half-century. Stovall was a great player who starred under both Paul Dietzel and Charles McClendon, was named National Coach of the Year in 1982 and fired a year later at 42.

Bertman retired at 62 and stayed in Baton Rouge for a quarter-century after his career ended. His legion of former players who loved their coach is his most profound testament to greatness.

Stovall was a Heisman Trophy runner-up in 1962, was an All-Pro performer as a member of the St. Louis Cardinals for nine seasons. He became LSU head coach in the most difficult of circumstances. His dream job opened after a plane crash killed Bo Rein on Jan. 10, 1980.

Stovall was at odds with Dietzel successor Bob Brodhead who sacked him on Dec. 2, 1983 in a memorable showdown at a raucous LSU Board of Supervisors meeting. Brodhead implied that Stovall was in over his head. There remains a diversity of opinion on this assessment, but this writer can attest that Stovall saw the evolution of football.

The coach told me as a student journalist that the future of the game was big lineman and small running backs. Stovall loved Lance Smith and Dalton Hilliard because they fit his vision of the game. He was right. And he was wise enough to move the angular Eric Martin from running back to receiver, propelling Martin to a decade as a stalwart of the New Orleans Saints.

LSU basketball teammates **Bob Pettit** and **Ned Clark** died six months apart with Pettit following his sidekick to the other side on Sept. 24. Pettit and Clark guided the Tigers to the Final Four in 1953 and a conference record of 27-0 in 1953-54.

Pettit was one of the best players in the history of the game, winning NBA MVP awards in 1956 and 1959 and finishing in the top four for the honor eight times in eleven seasons. He led the St. Louis Hawks to the league title in 1958 and retired as the game's top scorer and second leading rebounder in 1965.

Not bad for the skinny kid from Baton Rouge High who grew up at1966 Olive Street and was the son of the town sheriff.

Ron Abernathy was the most notable of Dale Brown's assistants in 25 years. He died at 75 on June 23 after battling cancer with the same spirit that made him one of the nation's top recruiters in the 1970s and '80s. Abernathy came to LSU from Louisville where he coached Rudy Macklin at Shawnee High School. He was instrumental in coaxing a bevy of standouts, including Shaquille O'Neal, John Williams and Chris Jackson.

Abertnathy returned to Baton Rouge in January for a reunion of the 1986 Final Four team and appeared to be in good health. He was a non-smoker who was diagnosed with lung cancer.

The rise of LSU basketball to its pinnacle from 1979-93 when the Tigers advanced to a post-season tournament tevery year and won four SEC championships is traced to the migration from Kentucky to Louisiana of Abertnathy and Macklin.

Dale Brown Receives Greatest Honor

LSU's most celebrated basketball coach will receive the prestigious John Wooden Award in Los Angeles in early 2027.

The Legends of Coaching distinction was first presented in 1999 and goes to one coach each year. Brown was chosen by a committee considering character, success rate on the court, graduation rate of athletes, coaching philosophy and identification of goals for the John R. Wooden Award.

The first four recipients were Dean Smith, Mike Kryzewski, Lute Olsen and Denny Crum. Women's coaches to receive the award include Pat Summitt, Geno Auriemma and Dawn Staley.

Brown's father deserted his family two days before Dale's birth on Halloween 1935 in the frigid hamlet of Minot, N.D. Wooden was the father figure in the remarkable life of the man who was touted as Norman Vincent Peale in sneakers. Brown cites Wooden as his mentor despite competing vigorously against him on the recruiting trail as an assistant coach at Utah State.

Brown often visited Wooden at his modest residence in Encino in the final years of life for the Wizard of Westwood. Wooden died in 2010 at 99 years old, more than 35 years after directing UCLA to ten NCAA titles in 12 years.

Brown, 91, wept when he was informed of this selection by the Los Angeles Athletic Club.

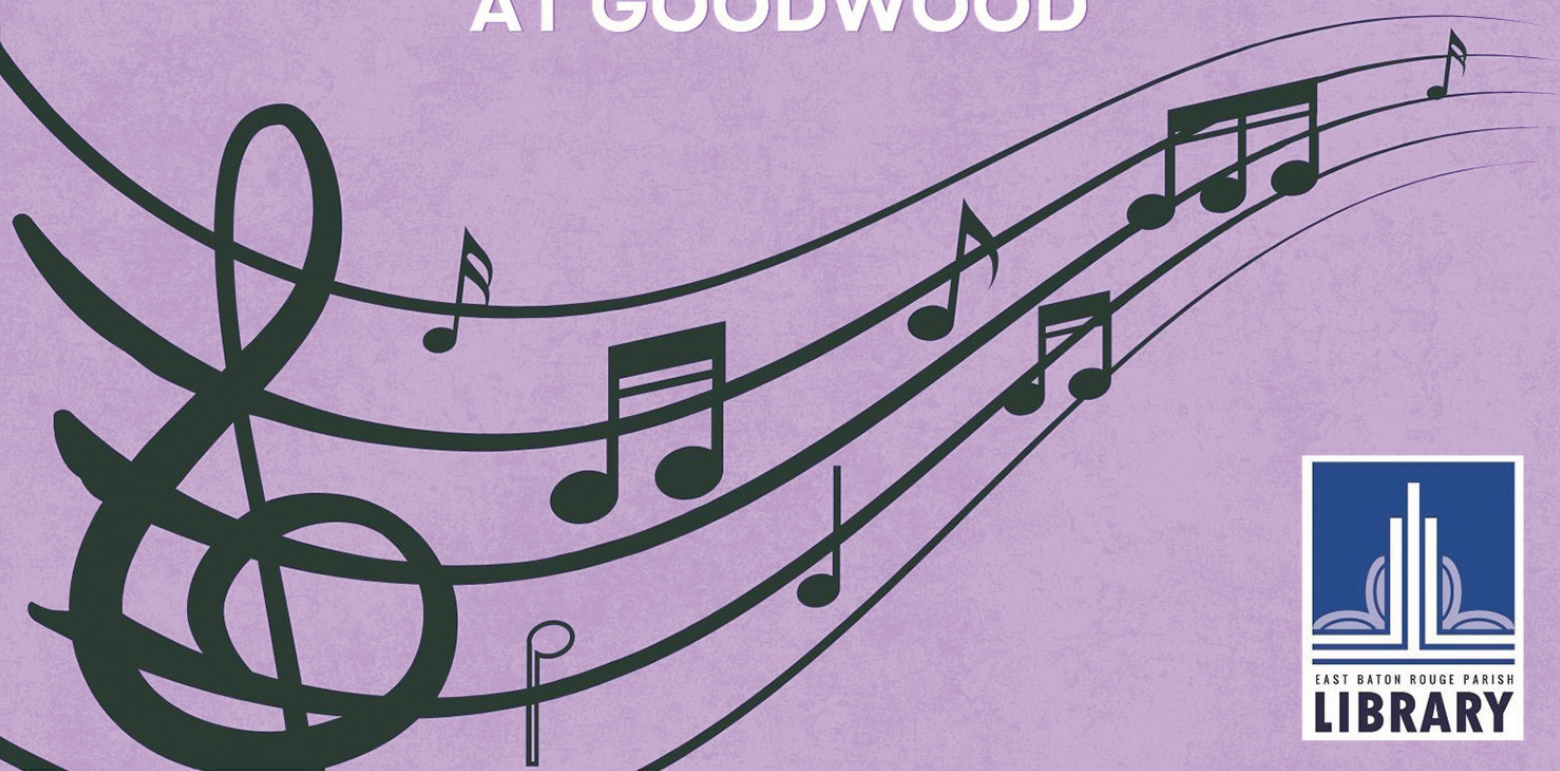
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