



Ole Miss Head Coach Video Conference December 27, 2021

Ole Miss

COACH KIFFIN: Well, we're excited to be here at the Sugar Bowl; obviously, an amazing tradition. For us to be in there in our second year, just a phenomenal job by our players and assistant coaches.

Playing a great opponent. I know Coach [Dave] Aranda well -- not from working with him, but from going against him at a number of places. I remember being at one of the places and there was a stat of the previous five years of where he had been -- they had the best average per run allowed in the country combined over the five years. So they've always played great wherever he's been and you can see how hard they play, and give people a lot of problems.

So it's an exciting match-up. Obviously COVID is still around and has been an issue that we are dealing with. We pushed back as far as we could from going down there, for as long as we could, just from getting out of our protocols here, which are easier to follow. So we'll be there eventually.

Q. In terms of adjusting on the fly, with the COVID protocols, how has this changed the way that you have prepped over the last few days? I guess, how kids went home for vacation and whatnot?

COACH KIFFIN: Yes, we just got back last night. So we practiced this morning. That would have been no different. We came back the same time as if we were going to New Orleans. So we would have been in New Orleans last night, practicing there this morning, just like we did. So none of the prep part has changed. We're just doing our stuff here instead of there.

And that's not -- I mean, really, actually these players, outside of transfers, none of them have been to a bowl game, besides last year at the Outback, which was similar to this because of COVID, where we went close to the game, as opposed to a normal bowl week.

Q. I want to talk about what it says about your team, the fact that there are no opt-outs from this team. What does it show about the cohesion of the group?

COACH KIFFIN: I think it's awesome, especially -- we didn't have a conversation. It's not like someone came in waivering and we had to talk them out of it, or go over the pros and cons. I think it says a lot about this team. I think it says the culture that's been created here and -- I think improvement from year one to two year, also, when you look at that. It takes a while for your culture to set in. So that was really cool to see, to not have to deal with that.

Q. Two questions for you. First, what can you say about [kicker] Caden Costa's situation and Ole Miss' support for him and his appeal? And secondly, when you see all the other bowl games or some of them having trouble, teams having to opt out; and yet in other cases, the big New Year's six games, teams are coming in as scheduled. What went into your thinking that this would be the best thing to do is to delay your coming down as late as possible?



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COACH KIFFIN: Ideally from a COVID standpoint, we would come in like a road game, the night before. Because that's just -- just think about it: Why are you going to go somewhere early, have your kids walking around a different city, around different people? Picture a week of walking around Bourbon Street and everything, I don't think that's really up there high on COVID protocol.

So we stayed as long as they would let us, actually, because of that. It's easier to monitor kids, have them here where they are used to. There's not a lot of stuff around here with school being out, also, so there's not a lot of places for them to go and things.

We really were already scheduled to leave when this came about where they allowed us -- actually, literally as people were leaving here before the break is when they came out and said -- with allowing us not to have to go as scheduled for teams. We were already going. Had that been a day or two earlier, we may have changed even the Christmas part, and not let these kids go home for Christmas, like I think Michigan did.

I know it's not ideal for them, but do you want to do that, or do you want to go have fun for a week and have players get COVID and they can't play or we can't even play the game?

Q. With all this stuff, do you have anybody who can't practice right now because of the spike, or anybody that you think might be in danger of missing the game?

COACH KIFFIN: Yeah, we do. As you know from being around here, we're not going to get into that and the number of them or the details of it, but, yeah. We do.

Q. How are you handling testing? What are the requirements? Is it all self-reporting, or is there something that the Sugar Bowl is making you do with that sort of stuff?

COACH KIFFIN: Yeah, I'm not getting into all of that, but we are doing best we can to manage it.

Q. You have put a big emphasis on fans in the stands and how it affects the game play, and talking about fans staying in the stadium. What are you looking for out of the fans down in New Orleans? What are you expecting from the fans?

COACH KIFFIN: Well, I hope they show up. You never know, especially in COVID, what is going to happen and even the ones who bought them, do they keep them? Do they have COVID issues in family? Do they sell them? I don't think we'll have any idea about which side has more fans and how many actual fans are there being a neutral site game, and with all the COVID stuff going on.

Q. Coach Kiffin, what does being invited to the Sugar Bowl say about the progress that the team has made over the past few seasons?

COACH KIFFIN: Well, like I said in the opening, it says a lot about our players, that two short seasons, with COVID shortening the first one and no spring that year, to be in the Sugar Bowl. And



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crazy enough, someone said the other day: What if you would have played good versus Auburn? I don't even know if that's allowed. Are there three SEC teams in the playoffs, because we're sitting there at 11-1? That's crazy to think that you are even that close to that level in year two. It just speaks a ton of the players and formats.

Q. Obviously, a lot of stuff behind the scenes in terms of COVID testing and all that stuff throughout the year, but for the most part, this season kind of went unimpeded. Is there a frustration factor from you or your players or anyone that this is all starting to happen right now at the very end of a season that for the most part kind of went about as well as it could have?

COACH KIFFIN: I think they have trained. They have two years of hearing worrying about what you can control. And they certainly can't control COVID, whether that's changing games or how you go to games and stuff like that. We worry about what we can control. They started to understand that, and this would fall into that.

Q. I asked you earlier about Caden Costa. You didn't answer that. What happened with him, do you believe? Can you talk about his appeal, and where do things stand with that?

COACH KIFFIN: Well, we hope his appeal, obviously, comes through and that he's back. I can't -- with HIPAA, I can't get into anything more than that.