



**Ole Miss Head Coach
Video Conference**
December 31, 2021

Ole Miss

COACH KIFFIN: Well, we're honored and blessed to be here. Obviously great tradition in the Sugar Bowl and for us to be back here a second time, I think, in 40 years. Speaks a lot to our players and our assistant coaches.

We have a great matchup with Coach [Dave] Aranda and extremely well-coached team that plays very physical. Doesn't make many mistakes, so it's going to be a very big challenge for us. And we're very honored to be here.

Q. Coach [Dave] Aranda was talking about the importance of relationships, building those in terms of helping prevent opt-outs, maybe building chemistry. You've talked a lot about the chemistry on this team. Are there other things you think that can be done that would encourage players to hang around and really play this last game? I mean, you guys haven't struggled with that, it appears; but a lot of other bowl games have.

COACH KIFFIN: Well, I think a lot of that has to do with the culture and the players that you have, too. I think when your quarterback would be the most obviously opt-out, never even thinks about it and the players know that and he's played through injuries when he could have not played in games, I think it starts at the top.

So I think our culture's come a long ways. You look back a year ago, I think we had a few opt-outs; so things have changed.

Q. Just two years ago, 2019, this team won four games. And now I mean they're playing in the Sugar Bowl. I know you weren't here for that in 2019, but a lot of players were on that team. And to see kind of that rise and them all being part of that journey together, based on your head coaching experience, do you think that -- I don't know -- kind of going through a leap like that, do you think that kind of helps add to their culture and the fact the guys have been through a climb like that? How much does that kind of help cohesion?

COACH KIFFIN: I think a lot. Our last job at FAU (Florida Atlantic University), they had won three games and then won 11 games our first year. So we were able to see that excitement. They'd only won three games for three years in a row. So it's exciting to be part of -- as opposed to just being on the top and staying on the top is working your way up to the top. I think our players have a better appreciation for being here because of that.

Q. Just when you look at Coach [Dave] Aranda's Baylor team, what are those qualities that are the first that kind of stand out about them just on tape?

COACH KIFFIN: I think how physical they play, disciplined. They're so well coached. You don't just see many big plays against them or screw-ups, which makes it hard to beat. He basically has created a team like his defense always have been, limit big plays, very smart, disciplined defense. Now he has a whole team of it.



**Ole Miss Head Coach
Video Conference**
December 31, 2021

Ole Miss

Q. You talked earlier in the week about COVID and all the precautions, just following up, how do you think the team has handled the trip to New Orleans so far? And are you guys in the same position you were three or four days ago?

COACH KIFFIN: I think they've done well. As you guys know, we came down here as late as we could to help that. It's not been ideal for them from a fun week, but it is what it is. And I think we're blessed to be in a big-time bowl so they could understand the importance of staying locked down for the most part and being COVID safe over going and having fun.

Q. I was just kind of wondering if you could comment on the reports about Charlie Weis, Jr. joining your staff. And then follow up on that, do you expect more coaching staff movement on your staff after the game?

COACH KIFFIN: I think that's always the case. When you do well, you, a lot of times, lose coaches. That's part of it. You don't lose many when you're not doing well. So with winning, a few problems come, and that's one of them. We lost a few last year. And so we're excited to bring Charlie Weis aboard. Charlie's been with us before, at Alabama, at FAU (Florida Atlantic University). And so very familiar with how we do things.