



# Georgia Postgame Press Conference

January 1, 2026



## QUOTES FOR HEAD COACH KIRBY SMART, GUNNER STOCKTON, AND DAYLEN EVERETTE

**COACH SMART:** I'd open with the Sugar Bowl staff, committee, they did a wonderful job hosting us. Felt safe all week, or the three days we were here. They did a great job of bringing New Orleans into our hotel, and I know our players enjoyed being here. It felt very different than last year in terms of the environment and everything.

Great crowd out there today. Probably more partisan Ole Miss than ours, but it felt like you're on a road game with their atmosphere.

And they had momentum a lot. It was a back-and-forth game. It was an incredible college football game. It's what the CFP was built for, to have battles like that. And that was basically every conference game we had this year. I felt like every game was like that one: back, forth, back, forth. Plays being made all over.

A lot of credit goes to Ole Miss, the defensive improvements they made. They played much better and tougher and more physical on defense, created some problems for us. And their quarterback is just incredible. I mean, he does an unbelievable job of not giving up sacks and making plays with his legs.

They made more plays than we did; and I've got to be honest, that's part of football. They made more, and outexecuted us, outcoached us, outplayed us.

But I enjoyed that game and that atmosphere. I am proud of our team. I'm sick that we lost, and there's things I would love to go back and do differently. But I'm just so proud of the way our guys competed when down ten, and just didn't finish it.

**Q. Kirby, on that final third down that you guys had, what led to the decision for the pass there? And did you consider running the ball at all in that situation?**

**COACH SMART:** The last third down, do you mean before the field goal? We wanted to score a touchdown. I think we were on the 3 or 4. We wanted to score to win. The book says, Go win the game. We talked about it in between. I thought by calling a timeout, run it, they don't have timeouts, ease the clock down. Playing for a tie doing that, right? And I just don't believe in playing for a tie.

Had to go for tie because we didn't complete it. But we knew we were going to leave time on the clock. We felt like defensively we were playing well. To be honest with you, it was a two-point play to win the Sugar Bowl, or at least have a chance to win the Sugar Bowl, because they would have got the ball back. But I feel really good about that. I didn't want to run it.

We ran it on second thinking we could do it, and they got the look. And Gunner [Stockton] did a good job checking that run.



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**Q. Kirby, I think that was early in the fourth quarter when you guys had the punt team on, ran them off, put the offense on. What was the thinking there, particularly snapping the ball and trying to convert on that fourth down?**

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, we screwed that up a little bit. We had a misfire there. It was a change-up from the look we had done twice. And we knew teams were going to sit back and not honor us, because we had not snapped it on those plays in two different locations, two different times. And the ball was not supposed to be snapped in that situation.

But that was on us as coaches. It was on me and our guys. It's not on the players. And Gunner [Stockton] and those guys did a nice job executing it.

But we did feel like we had lost momentum at that point, and the book says we needed to go for it. There's probably another way I would like to have gone for it, but we did not execute the situation really well there. It was a situation where it gave us an either/or. We didn't have to snap it. We could take a delay. We could sit back, see what happened, just to take a chance.

**Q. You already answered part of my question, but you went for it on fourth down three times in the second half. You mentioned you felt momentum was slipping away, even when you had the lead. Two of the three worked. But did you feel like you -- you mentioned Ole Miss was making more plays. Did you feel like you needed to have that kind of change in momentum?**

**COACH SMART:** I don't know which fourth you're referring to. I think we had to go for one of them because we were down.

**Q. You were down. You had three timeouts left. There were three minutes, 15 seconds left. It was fourth and 9, but you made it.**

**COACH SMART:** I couldn't kick the field goal.

**Q. No, you could have punted.**

**COACH SMART:** No chance I'm punting there. We're not going to get another possession possibly. We had three timeouts to stop them if they didn't get it.

**Q. Fair enough. The fake punt, though, when you were leading, which worked --**

**COACH SMART:** We had lost momentum at that point. We were leading, but I think we were leading maybe by two or so. And we felt like we could get momentum back with that play. And we felt like it was there, and the kids did a great job executing it.

**Q. Despite ultimately losing, you guys did rally down ten. And this is for Gunner [Stockton]. I know you took a lot of hits today. Can you just talk about how you were feeling both mentally and physically when you were able to rally and tie the game late.**



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**GUNNER STOCKTON:** Yeah. When there's time on the clock, we feel like we're still in the game. And I mean, that's what we did. And I mean, just playing, just playing for everybody on the team and just trying to give my best effort.

**Q. Kirby, in your experience, does a play like that misfire that you talked about, does that stay with you for a long time? Or do you think about it, like you said, it was a good game, and there were a lot of other plays from your career? Do things linger a long time like that?**

**COACH SMART:** Yeah, I mean, that's football. We made a bunch of plays. You can take that and the fake punt and call it even. That kept the possession alive.

We've made a lot of plays this year in those critical moments where we had guys jump offsides on disciplined teams. I think back to -- I think it was Texas at home. They jumped offsides and we got a free play off of that. It's been really huge. We've gained more possessions than probably anybody in the country by what we've done being aggressive and trying to do things that required discipline and execution.

We just didn't execute that one. I mean, at worst there, we would have gotten a delay and given our punter, who's one of the best punters in the country, five yards to give up or call timeout.

But we didn't execute, so in hindsight, it didn't work. But that did not cost us the game, let me assure you, because we came back, scored, kicked another one, got the game tied, had a chance to win it. Called a good play for the coverage they were in, and we didn't make the play. The kid knocked the ball down on Oscar [Delp], and then -- we had third and 5. We're going to have a chance to get the ball back and maybe win the two-minute. And they made a good throw and catch.

**Q. You ran the ball. Were you thinking more of forcing them to use their timeouts in case you scored a touchdown and they would have limited time to score? What were your thoughts on that?**

**COACH SMART:** So we're number one or two in the country in red-zone offense, right? Scoring TDs. What do we do well? We run it. That's what we do well. We run it down there really well.

It's not very far you get to throw it. We've been really, really good at running it. And by doing that, you also force them to call a timeout, assuming they stop you. Assuming they stop you. If they don't stop us, then they've got time on the clock to go out there and run their two-minute offense and try to score back.

They burnt two timeouts. They were out of timeouts, and the decision was what he talked about. Do we run it on third and just play for a tie? Because it's hard to run the ball in from third and 3. I don't know what yard line we were on. I felt like it was 3, 3 1/2, 2, like a two-point play. I liked the call, I liked the play, and I liked going to win the game. I feel like if we scored there and we kicked it, we're up, and they've got to score a touchdown to beat us. I'm like, I'll take that every time with our defense in two minutes.



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So, I liked the plays there. I mean, if we run it and don't get it, then I'm sitting here playing for a tie, and I don't love that, or playing for overtime.

**Q. Kirby, I think in the first game against them this year, they had 10, 11, 12 yards in the fourth quarter and [Trinidad] Chambliss didn't do much. Did you sense a whole lot of a different strategy, approach, execution on their part in this game that you saw in that first matchup this year?**

**COACH SMART:** No, not at all. I mean, I don't know what stats they -- I thought we played better defensively than we did last time. Now, we didn't play better maybe in the fourth. We played good in the fourth. We had a three and out, got the ball right back and went and scored. We just didn't the last drive. We go stop, stop, bat a ball. It's third down and 5. We play man-to-man. This guy's really good at throwing the ball.

You can think that they might run the ball there, because if they don't get a completion there, we're getting the ball back, and they're looking at it. They played to win the game, and we played to win the game. We didn't play to go to overtime, because a lot of people would have said, Oh, third and 5, let's just run it and milk the clock out or they'll call timeout. They went for it, and they made a good play.

So, I don't know if your reference is we didn't play as good in the fourth as we did last time. We had a lot of momentum and we were at home. That was a big factor.

**Q. Schematically or execution-wise, they looked any different? Obviously, Lane [Kiffin] is not there.**

**COACH SMART:** No, they ran the same plays, and they ran them well. There's several plays where they've got the quarterback running around out there and he makes unbelievable plays. The play to [Kewan] Lacy on our sideline where we blitz a corner and he does a complete circle around [David] Lalaian, and then he hits a deep over on Ellis [Robinson IV] and scrambled. Their scrambles were explosive, and you think about Gunner's [Stockton] scrambles that he had that were explosive. Both quarterbacks made some plays with their legs. A lot of credit to that kid and their offense.