

# Louisiana State University Football Media Conference

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## Les Miles

COACH MILES: It's interesting, you worry about your team when you don't play a game because they work so hard, they're so committed. Kendell Beckwith said, you work so hard to put together just one game plan, and he is exactly right. So we did everything that we could to play.

The challenge to our football team is to improve without that game, and that's the issue. There's certain advantages that we have that are inherent to the position that we currently have, but one of which is that we didn't play that first game.

Things that I did during the break, I did football. First of all, we took the plays, and we talked about them right side up, and then we turned them sideways, and we looked at them sideways, and we turned them upside down, and we looked at them upside down. And we got all of the adjustments that could possibly have been made from those plays as quickly as we could.

Then we really -- our guys were getting pent up. They were in the locker room for hours, and we basically told them to stretch and relax and nap if you will. We're going to get you some food. We fed them. And we spent the time, to be very honest with you, in view of what our players needed should they take the field.

It was about 9:45, 10:00, and I said, hey, listen -- to the leaders of my team. I said, get prepared. I said, we desperately want to play this game. We're looking forward to it. It's what you need to do, and you need to focus on it. So we're hopeful that we will get a call here. When we get the call, we're going to -- I mean, if we could get within 15 minutes of a time where they would allow us onto the field, we would have stretched our team so that, when we got to the 15-minute spot, that we could go onto the field and warm up in 15 minutes and then play the game. But we could never get to that time.

We watched weather. WBRZ did a great job of showing the weather the entire time. I don't know where Cabo (phonetic) is, but he should take a bow. Thank you. We took every kind of forecast that could be given, and it was -- we were not going to get to play



that game. We would have run up to about 11:45.

There's a rule, I'm told, that at about 11:45, if you don't start this game by 12:00 midnight, if it's an SEC opponent, you forfeited the opportunity to play that day. So we were in a position where, let's see, if we could have got on the field at 11:45, we would have played it.

12:45, 1:45, 2:45 in the morning, and then frankly our doctors came in, and we asked them very specifically, what is this like for our athletes? Well, they won't be as reactionary. They will not be as prepared. They will not have food. They will not have nutrition. They will not have rest. It's likely -- I should say a greater percentage chance that they could have injury, let alone mindset. Here we are taking the field in Tiger Stadium in the middle of the night to play a game.

But nevertheless, they wanted to. We would well have, but the weather did not cooperate, and that's that.

Defensively, we had really a nice three and out. First play was made by Rickey Jefferson, made a nice, very explosive play from his secondary spot. Second play was a sack by Rickey Jefferson and Tashawn Bower. The third play, they got some yards, but they still punt.

Jamie Keehn kicked the ball like it was going to go out of the stadium. It was a bomb.

Offensively, we moved the football. We had a nice run and threw a ball that a blocker needed to do his job and then try to hit a long pass, see if we could put seven on the board because we kind of expected that maybe there was weather in the perimeter.

But all in all, if you have to grade nine plays or so, I think we're -- I think the kids played hard and really looked forward to play. I think that they will turn their attentions very comfortably, and have, to Mississippi State.

Dan Mullen's done a great job there. They won ten games a year ago. They were ranked No. 1 in the nation. They've gone to five straight bowls. They beat a very improved Southern Miss team in Hattiesburg, which to me is a real accomplishment.

Offensively, their offense revolves around Dak Prescott.

He had 268 yards passing, two touchdowns, rushed for 105 yards and a score. He's as good a college quarterback as there is. Their offense has averaged 478 yards per game for the last 21 games with Dak Prescott as the starter.

He is helped on offense by running back Brandon Holloway. He also had a 100-yard kickoff return in the opening kick at Hattiesburg. He also rushed for 51 yards, and he's also in the backfield with a big back, Ashton Shumpert. They have very good wide receivers led by De'Runnya Wilson and a talented guy.

So their defense is big and strong and fast to the ball. They held Southern Miss to 102 yards rushing, intercepted two passes, had three sacks, limited Southern Miss to 4 of 17 on third downs. New defensive coordinator Manny Diaz is a very talented coach and a guy that's been around, understands major college football and how to defend it.

Overall, we're looking forward to playing and getting the season opener completed. With a kickoff at 8:15, our guys like night games, and we will look forward to playing in Starkville, Mississippi. So questions?

**Q. You mentioned your team has certain advantages to not having played the other night. Do you think they outweigh the disadvantages of kind of not getting that experience and some of the young guys getting their feet wet?**

COACH MILES: We would love to have played by far and away. With the idea that now, at this point in time, that's not possible, then what are the advantages? Well, there are some. We'll enjoy our preparation, and we'll be fresh, and we'll look forward to Mississippi State with the enthusiasm of getting to play the opener.

**Q. Les, will Sione Teuhema and Deondre Clark, will they play? I know they weren't dressed out last week.**

COACH MILES: I'm not certain. It depends on if they earn their way there.

**Q. How about Mickey Johnson and Chidi Valentino-Okeke?**

COACH MILES: Valentino. Valentino is a real kind of a swinging spot you put him on. I think Chidi will be redshirted. Who else did you ask?

**Q. Mickey Johnson.**

COACH MILES: Mickey Johnson, I don't think Mickey is going to play.

**Q. This week or this season?**

COACH MILES: This season.

**Q. Followup to the first question about the advantages. As a coach, if you have no film to watch on Mississippi State, obviously, they have no film to watch on you from this season, is that also -- to what extent is that an advantage for LSU?**

COACH MILES: It's really not, but your body of work is small. So they get to see what we have, and certainly we share -- we didn't have the weather, certainly we'd have played it. They would have gotten the entire game.

We've seen their first game in its entirety.

**Q. What's Brandon's mentality as he prepared for his first start, then it doesn't happen, and now he goes on the road?**

COACH MILES: I was miserable for him. He was one of the guys who didn't take his shoulder pads off the whole time. He just really wanted to play. You could see the disappointment in his face.

Obviously, I was gone Monday, but he's going to play, and he's going to play well. He just needs to relax and look forward to playing with a very talented team.

**Q. Coach, as you game plan for a mobile quarterback for your first couple of games, do you find that Kevin Steele has brought new ideas to the table in how to combat that?**

COACH MILES: Yeah, he has a very quality -- both he and Ed Orgeron have a very quality view of a mobile quarterback and kind of how to operate. I think, first and foremost, putting speed on the field is the most important piece, and we do that.

**Q. We joked after the game that you were going to play ten freshmen on each side of the ball, but clearly you had a commitment early to get those guys on the field. Was that just their talent, or was it opportunity? Why did they kind of open it up a little early?**

COACH MILES: That is talent. Those are guys that, frankly, we will see playing in virtually every game. I would guess that the number at some point in time would approach 15.

**Q. Coach, you wait all summer for a first game, it gets cancelled, now you've got to wait until 8:15 at night. How are you going to keep the team from going stir crazy and keep them calm and everything before this game?**

COACH MILES: We only spend two hours on site before the game. So we'll be in there getting dressed and back out and warming up and taking punts and fielding balls and throwing, catching. So that time will go by very quickly.

**Q. This is more of an SEC question. There are a lot of new quarterbacks in the league this year that -- you know, new starters. People aren't sure how reliable or consistent they'll be. To what extent is that offset in the SEC by the quality of running backs? How much can a running back compensate for -- on certain quarterbacks, and what do you think of the SEC running backs?**

COACH MILES: It really depends on the offensive line and how good the running back is, and is he in position to carry the load for some time? I don't know. I can't answer some of those things for other teams. I think we're pretty talented there, and I think our offensive line can block it. So we should pose a real issue to some defenses.

**Q. Coach, will you use what happened last year as motivation for this year, or is that game long gone? What's your take on all of that?**

COACH MILES: I think our guys recognize, having finished second to a team in our conference, I think most teams recognize that the opportunity to play well and play best is here, and playing in our conference is awfully important to us. I don't know that you use anything else other than that.

**Q. Coach, last week there was a lot of thinking back ten years ago through Hurricane Katrina, when you first came to LSU and the loss of games being played here, then all of a sudden we start this season with a game that's cancelled because of the weather. Can you draw on your parallels from them, and do you learn anything on how to handle this situation from the way you handled the Katrina situation?**

COACH MILES: I think our team is not nearly disadvantaged as the Katrina team was with an hourly reminder with helicopters going overhead. I think that this, although certainly is a weather limitation, it's certainly not, nor was it, life-threatening in any way.

It cost us the opportunity to play a game, and that's darn important to us, especially at the end of the season, and it's darn important to us as we develop a team, but in terms of the parallel, I guess, I think our guys recognize the situation that they're in, are looking forward to improving this week, recognize that improvement must take place, and looking forward to playing Mississippi State certainly.

I think there's -- I don't think there's any fatigue. I think they're well rested. They had a day off yesterday, and it's a day off from school, I should say. I think they're looking forward to playing.

**Q. You said that Sione and Deondre have to earn their way back to dressing out. What did you mean**

**by that?**

COACH MILES: We play the best players. Certainly, if they're the best players, they'll step in there and go.

**Q. So is it all performance based, or was it off the field that prevented them from dressing out?**

COACH MILES: It's all performance based. And Chidi's being redshirted.

**Q. Coach, I'm sure you're aware of the Tom Brady issue with the deflated football. As an old sandlot passer from way back, I can attest that you can throw the ball, and slightly deflated is better than one that's fully pumped. Is the college football, is the ball standard -- I assume that everybody uses the same ball. Who is responsible for seeing the balls are inflated properly? Is it the home team, or who is it?**

COACH MILES: The officiating crew. We bring 12 balls or thereabouts to the officials, and they check it. It's got to be between 12 1/2 and 13 1/2. It's an amazing thing, in my opinion, how a couple of pounds difference that makes that ball feel, like you're saying. If you deflate it significantly, man, that ball feels -- you have great comfort with the throw.

But good thing about Brandon Harris, he's got big hands, and he swallows that ball up, and he throws it well.

**Q. For Dak Prescott, facing him last year and the last couple years, what makes him so unique? And as big as he is, when he gets full steam ahead, what are the challenges of trying to take him down?**

COACH MILES: He's a big strong guy, and he really has nice command of the offense, does the things that that offense asks him to do. He really, as big as he is, he gets in the right hole and makes a nice cut.

**Q. You mentioned Brandon Holloway in your opening statement, 5'8", 165. Does he do things particularly well that help him overcome any inherent disadvantage in his stature? And do you, based on what you've seen, expect that you'll have to prepare for him as a more regular role than he's had in the past?**

COACH MILES: I would guess that he would play a significant role in the offense. I would say that he would be certainly a kick return guy. But great speed. I don't think stature has anything to do with it. I think he has a very good stature, very quality stature in terms of how he runs through the field.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk about losing a game and what effect long term that might have. Have you given any thought to playing 11 regular season**

**games if the College Football Playoff Selection Committee, should it get to that, might look negatively upon your team for one less game?**

COACH MILES: I have -- there's nothing that I can do about it. At this point in time, I want to prepare and play the season and certainly the season we have remaining and play extremely well and control our own destiny. We do those things, we're a very talented team. We should control outcomes anyway.

**Q. The freshmen getting to go through the pregame and get out there in front of the crowd, how much of a benefit can that be to those guys even in that little bit of exposure?**

COACH MILES: The freshmen who get out in front of the team in the warmups?

**Q. The freshmen who played for those couple plays and went through the pregame and all that this past Saturday, how much of a benefit can they take from that even though they didn't play full game?**

COACH MILES: It's a huge benefit. By and large, it is a short game where victory was not determined. But they warmed up. They went through the pregame regimen. They understand what we expect from them from tests and walk-throughs. Then we expect them to get warmed up in a very specific manner. They did.

I have to be very honest with you, offense, defense, and special teams, we had a small number of reps but a very significant number because everything that we do is, and I think that those freshmen that played are benefited greatly.

**Q. State had the most yards that LSU has given up since you've been here last year. Dak went over 100 yards rushing. What have you guys not been able to accomplish against them that you need to do on Saturday to win that game?**

COACH MILES: There was a scramble touchdown that, frankly, we should well have covered, but Dak's pretty talented too. He's a guy that makes plays and gets up in the seam, and he doesn't go down unless you tackle him. I think the key piece to what we're going to try to do this week is prepare tackling. If we do that, I think it will make a difference.

**Q. Coach, now that we got to see kind of what that starting defense looked like with Kevin Toliver on the corner, Dwyane Thomas at nickel, can you tell us about that competition at fall camp and maybe where Ed Paris falls in?**

COACH MILES: Again, I think we're a very talented group in the secondary. Ed Paris, in my opinion, fits right in that group. We don't hesitate to put him in the game in any way. But Toliver at corner and Dwyane Thomas could also play at corner and a nickel spot.

There's a lot of flexibility with our players because they're fast and very bright guys. So we think our secondary is capable of making adjustments and using personnel to benefit us.

**Q. What kind of things did Toliver do to get a leg up?**

COACH MILES: He's a physical, fast, very -- he's a 6-footer at corner. He can play. He can tackle. He's a talented man. Didn't take much for the coaching staff to recognize it.

**Q. How do you compensate for not having any game film, not playing at game speed. How do you compensate for that in three days of practice this week? How do you make up for all that?**

COACH MILES: You would have certainly enjoyed that, but we didn't have that game before we played McNeese. So in the exact same position where we're going to play our best, and we're going to expect our guys to do the things we've taught them to do in terms of block, tackle, and ball security, and let's go get the ball.

Certainly, if you had a dress rehearsal at all, it would have been great. Thank goodness we didn't. I would not have been for a lightning strike. I would not have been for finishing at 3:30 in the morning and having injury. And I would not have been for missing an open date before we played Alabama. So frankly, it's not ideal, but you know what, we're in pretty good shape. We're going to look forward to playing this one. I like my team.

**Q. Coach, you've been to Starkville a few times. What's your take on cow bells? Is that kind of a unique crowd noise to deal with and rattling?**

COACH MILES: I think we need to petition to get some cow bells in our stadium. I think it would be an enjoyable piece as well. Honestly, as much as I've been in loud stadiums, I'm not distracted by cow bells.