

# Ole Miss football future looks as bright as the Florida sun at the Outback Bowl

## Mississippi Today

Starting running back Jerion Ealy, the blur who wears No. 9 for Ole Miss, was injured and unable to play in Saturday's Outback Bowl. No problem. The Rebels just moved on with talented backup Henry Parish Jr. and Snoop Conner, the third-team pile driver who would start for 95% of college football teams.

Leading receiver Elijah Moore, the best player in Mississippi college football this season, opted out of the bowl. So what? The Rebels just moved backup quarterback John Rhys Plumlee, the blur who wears No. 10, into the slot position, and he responded with five catches for 73 yards, including a crucial 44-yarder on the game winning drive. Tight end Kenny Yeboah, the second leading receiver, opted out, too. Again, no problem: Lane Kiffin turned to Casey Kelly, who caught six passes, including a touchdown, after catching only two passes all season long. Depth is such a wonderful commodity in college football.

So it was that backups and third-string skill position players played key roles in the Rebels' 26-20 victory over No. 11 Indiana on what appeared a spectacular Florida afternoon. So did quarterback Matt Corral, a future pro who was backup to Plumlee for much of 2019. So did an offensive line that generally mauled the Hoosiers' usually stout defensive front. So did a much-maligned Ole Miss defense, which bowed up with the game on the line.



Lane Kiffin, center, runs to avoid getting doused with water by his team after Ole Miss defeated Indiana during the Outback Bowl on Saturday in Tampa, Fla.

(AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

This was a day that began with the news that Ole Miss has extended the contract of first-year head coach Lane Kiffin, who was 5-5 against a schedule that included nine SEC games and the bowl game.

"This is an investment in the future of the Ole Miss football program," athletic director Keith Carter said of the extension, adding ... "The future is bright."

It certainly looks that way, especially on the offensive side of the ball. But the key for Ole Miss to become an SEC contender again is to build up the same kind of ability and depth on defense and across the offensive line that the Rebels now enjoy at the offensive skill positions.

Simply put: To successfully contend with the likes of Alabama, LSU, Texas A&M

and others, Ole Miss has to become as skilled and deep across the lines, at linebacker and in the defensive secondary as the Rebels now are at the offensive skill positions. And, yes, that is asking a lot.

Keith Carter will tell you the Rebels took a step in that direction with the most recent recruiting class, which went heavy on improving the defense. And that may be. But 247Sports.com, one of the most widely respected national recruiting websites, rated Ole Miss No. 19 in the nation, which sounds splendid until you see that Alabama was No. 1, LSU No. 5, and Texas A&M No. 7. Georgia, Florida and Tennessee also ranked ahead of Ole Miss. So, No. 19 in the nation computes to No. 7 in the SEC in recruiting.

It's a brutally tough league. But you knew that, and so did Kiffin when he took the job.

Ole Miss has the one ingredient every successful team must have: an elite quarterback. Corral completed 30 of 44 throws for 342 yards and two touchdowns without throwing an interception. You can count on one hand the number of college teams that had a quarterback as proficient as Corral this season. And it's not just his arm. He can run when he needs to, which he did seven times for 37 yards Saturday. He's tough. His team seems to rally around him. He has "it."

All season long it seemed such a shame to have another immensely talented player such as Plumlee watching from the sidelines. Here's a multitasking athlete, as fast as they come, who ran for 109 yards against Alabama and 212 yards against national champion LSU in 2019. I mean, Alabama and LSU defensive backs often thought they had the angle

on him — and then he was gone. Seems to this observer he may have found the right position if he wants to have a future in football. He can turn a seven-yard slant into a 70-yard touchdown in a heartbeat.

"We were down to four scholarship receivers," Kiffin said. "For a guy to play only one week at receiver ... it's a remarkable kid to be able to do that. You can't just do that. This isn't Pop Warner, you know, we're in major college football playing Top 10 teams..."

Said Plumlee, "I really enjoy quarterback but this week has been really fun at wide receiver. I feel really blessed to be in the position I am in and have two right answers. ... I'm unsure about it. I've got to do some praying about it."

Can Kiffin convince Plumlee that's where he needs to be? Is Plumlee dead-set on playing quarterback?

We shall see. What appears certain is that playing either of those positions in Kiffin's scheme looks a delightfully fun proposition. Watching Ole Miss for much of this season was like watching some of Steve Spurrier's offenses back in the day. Receivers run so wide open you swear they must smell bad or something.

The problem, of course, is that often the opponents' receivers have run just as free with little or no rush on the quarterback. And, too often, opponents' running backs have run into the secondary before they are even touched.

Therein lies the challenge. A mighty one.

## Hyde-Smith sworn-in for six-year term as 117th Congress begins

### Press Release

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) On Sunday, January 3, took the oath of office to serve all Mississippians in the United States Senate for the next six years.

Vice President Mike Pence officiated during the ceremony marking the start of the 117th Congress.

"It is a great privilege and honor to serve all Mississippians, and remain grateful for the trust of my state. The serious challenges facing our great state and nation will take dedicated commitment. I will continue to be faithful to that mission, and do everything I can to help build a stronger Mississippi and country as we overcome this global pandemic and look toward a brighter, prosperous future," Hyde-Smith said.

Hyde-Smith's husband Michael Smith and daughter Anna-Michael attended today's ceremonies, which were modified to meet COVID-19 safety precautions.

Hyde-Smith is the first woman elected to represent Mississippi in Washington, D.C. Mississippi voters in November elected the former state senator and Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce to a full six-year term.

Hyde-Smith has served in the U.S. Senate since April 2018 after being appointed by then-Governor Phil Bryant to the fill the seat after U.S. Senator Thad Cochran retirement. She won a special election and runoff in November 2018 to fulfill the remaining two years of Cochran's term.

## Public Notice

All interested public and private transit and paratransit operators within Holmes County, are hereby advised that the City of Tchula is applying to the Mississippi Department of Transportation, Jackson, Mississippi, for a grant under Section 5310 of the Federal Public Transportation Act, as amended, for the provision of Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Service (is being) (would be) provided within Holmes County. This program consists of three vans.

The purpose of this notice is to advise all interested parties, including transit and paratransit operators, of the service being planned for providing transportation services for the elderly and disabled within the area as described above, and to ensure that such a program would not represent a duplication of current or of proposed services provided by existing transit or paratransit operators in the area.

Comments either for or against this service will be received at any time within fifteen days from the date of this notice. All comments should be addressed to General Vann, Mayor of The City of Tchula, P.O. Box 356, Tchula, MS 39169.

# Send us your news!

The Holmes County Herald welcomes reader submissions for news, events and photos for publication in our weekly newspaper. To submit items, email to:

[hcherald@gmail.com](mailto:hcherald@gmail.com)

Please include all pertinent details, dates, location, name of the event or occasion, all associated people, organizations or groups, reason for event or occasion and NAMES OF ALL PEOPLE PICTURED IN ANY PHOTOGRAPH.

We look forward to hearing from you!

-Holmes County Herald Staff