RABALAIS

Continued from page 1C

the Tigers have roughed up the six teams they outclassed but lost to the three best teams they've faced (Ole Miss, Kentucky and Alabama). Those results don't inspire a lick of confidence. Especially since Texas and Tennessee are at least on par with those three best teams that already have beaten LSU, generally speaking. Either way, Kiffin deserves more time to prove himself and his methods.

Is it fair to have expected LSU to challenge for a CFP title during his first year?

NIL and the transfer portal certainly have broken the old rules that said a coach had to get at least two or three recruiting classes in before you could expect title contention. Indiana, of all teams, making the CFP in Year One under Curt Cignetti and UCLA being 9-0 under first-year coach Bob Chesney say it can be done. It has certainly reset the bar for a school with LSU's resources and tradition.

That said, the flip side of this new era is there are no guarantees.

Certainly not when you flip as much of the roster as Kiffin had to, bringing in more than 60 transfers and freshmen. That's a lot to make work in a short time.

In some ways, it's been great. Players such as Dilin Jones, Jackson Harris, Princewill Umanmielen and Ty Benefield have been huge additions.

Sam Leavitt has been a mixed bag. Sean Thompkins, who got to fill in for an injured Weston Davis at right tackle against Bama, and wide receiver Jayce Brown haven't contributed much.

Yes, LSU spent a sizable fortune on this roster, like the total revenue of Walt Disney World on a holiday weekend day sizable. But money is no guarantee. If it were, the New York Mets wouldn't have finished last in the National League East with baseball's second-priciest roster.



STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL JOHNSON

LSU coach Lane Kiffin looks to the video board during a timeout against Alabama on Saturday in Tiger Stadium.

What about all of the celebrities coming down Victory Hill?

The part of me that despises the vulgar chants and vulgar T-shirts in Tiger Stadium was quick to side with the folks who think Kiffin parading Victory Hill with the likes of Kevin Costner and Shaquille O'Neal and Angel Reese needs to go, along with the sideline basketball goal and fire extinguisher. It's not a good look when you lose. But that's all it is. A look. A perception.

I sincerely doubt Kiffin missed any practice time last week to take a call from Costner's people.

I read a critique of Kiffin that said he wants all of the attention on himself. That he has a huge ego. That doesn't make him much different from every football coach I've ever covered.

Kiffin wants to combine Hollywood glitz with Nick Saban accountability. It sounds like a tough mix, but when he led Ole Miss to an 11-1 regular season in 2025, no one complained.

If Kiffin and LSU miss the CFP, they will get the ridicule. The scorn. The withering criticism. The only cure for that is winning.

Saban had coaches and players on full blast his entire career. No one criticized him for being inhumane because he was a winner. It is the same for Kiffin as he marches down Victory Hill to the beat of his own drummer — a famous drummer such as Ringo Starr, perhaps.

What could the future hold for Kiffin and LSU?

There was pressure on Kiffin to lead LSU to the College Football Playoff this year. If the Tigers don't make it, the pressure ratchets up enormously next season, especially since the CFP expands to 24 teams.

Kiffin and other coaches got what they wanted: A bigger playoff means more job security, though so do expectations.

Perhaps a more pertinent question is if the Tigers wind up in the Gator Bowl, will LSU boosters still be bought in?

Kiffin has said repeatedly the rosters will be better going forward.

That takes money. A favorite quote from "The Right Stuff" certainly applies: "No bucks, no Buck Rogers."

Perhaps Shaq or Costner can write a check.

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LSU drops to No. 21 in new CFP rankings

BY JON BLAU
Staff writer

After suffering a third Southeastern Conference loss, LSU took an expected step back in the College Football Playoff race.

The Tigers (6-3, 3-3 SEC) were announced as the No. 21 team in the selection committee's rankings Tuesday, dropping seven spots after a 31-13 loss to now-No. 3 Alabama (7-2, 5-2).

If there is any silver lining, LSU has a chance to recover over the next two weeks. The Tigers will play host to No. 6 Texas (7-2, 4-2) on Saturday in Tiger Stadium, which is set for a 6:30 p.m. kickoff on ABC.

The next week, LSU is slated to travel to No. 8 Tennessee (7-2, 4-2) in a 2:30 p.m. kickoff in Neyland Stadium. The Tigers finish the regular season at Arkansas (3-6, 1-5).

"You get the schedule early, and then once it's going, you start seeing, OK, this chunk of three right here … this is three really good teams, maybe three top-12 teams, three of the best defenses in the country. You say, man, you really probably don't want that right in a row," Kiffin said of Alabama, Texas and Tennessee. "Now, because we lost, it's a good thing that it is because it gives you a chance right away to play a top-10 team."

LSU is currently the eighth-best SEC team in the selection committee's eyes, sitting behind No. 1 Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, No. 11 Kentucky, No. 17 South Carolina and No. 19 Ole Miss. The SEC also had No. 22 Missouri ranked in the top 25.

Kiffin came into his first season at LSU facing sky-high expectations, and he didn't expect to have three losses through nine games. He has consistently pointed to the Tigers' long-term injuries, including linebacker Whit Weeks and recently returned tight end Trey'Dez Green, as factors in a 6-3 start.

"But still … had a chance to finish out games," Kiffin said, stewing on an Ole Miss loss that was tied 24-24 in the fourth quarter, an overtime defeat to Kentucky and last weekend's loss where LSU led Alabama 13-10 late in the third quarter. Now LSU has to figure out ways to win games against ranked teams. Otherwise, a much-anticipated season will fall well short of the CFP.

"Realizing your back is to the wall, but also not thinking about it as much," LSU safety Ty Benefield said Tuesday of the Tigers' mindset. "We've got to understand the situation we're in. But we can't focus on it."

RANKINGS

Team	Record
1. Georgia	8–1
2. Utah	9–0
3. Alabama	7–2
4. UCLA	9–0
5. Notre Dame	8-1
6. Texas	7–2
7. Miami	8–1
8. Tennessee	7-2
9. Indiana	8–1
10. BYU	7–2
11. Kentucky	7-2
12. Texas Tech	8-1
13. Wake Forest	8-1
14. Houston	7-2
15. Iowa	7–2
16. Oregon	6–3
17. South Carolina	6-3
18. USC	7–2
19. Ole Miss	6–3
20. Ohio State	6–3
21. LSU	**6–3**
22. Missouri	6–3
23. Arizona	7–2
24. Boise State	8–1
25. Oklahoma State	6–3

SOUTHERN

Continued from page 1C

be."

One of the turning points Southern players shared was their players-only meeting after the loss to UAPB. Safety Herman Brister said Oct. 20 that accountability was the topic and that the team discussed how "off-the-field issues affect us on the field as well as when we don't have the guys and the bodies that we need to go long games in four quarters."

Since that meeting, Southern has won three of four games, with its lone loss coming on a walk-off 46-yard field goal by Texas Southern.

"Just to be transparent, our leaders, sometimes they're the ones that mess up and get chastised," Faulk said. "So you can't be afraid to tell someone what they're doing wrong, with the understanding that when you do something wrong, someone's going to point the finger at you as well. Accountability goes both ways."

Southern hopes this approach continues to manufacture wins. Faulk established he's not one to discuss the standings with his team as he prefers concentrating on a single game. But he's not going to police his players about the topic.

"I can't worry about it," he said. "I mean, it's not like I can take their phones. I can't take their devices, but what I have to do is make sure that they do more than just scenario watch. They actually can have a hand in this. And when there's a scenario, the first thing that you have to do is do your part, and that's what we're out to do. We're out to do our part."

Cornerback Landon Carter, who had an interception in last week's 45-17 win over Bethune-Cookman, said the Jaguars need to concentrate on winning out in the regular season.

"I mean, as much as you want to pay attention to all the other stuff, if we don't win out, none of that (matters)," the redshirt sophomore said.

"We pay attention to what we have to do, then we'll worry about all the other stuff."



STAFF PHOTO BY JAVIER GALLEGOS

Southern running back Mike Franklin is brought down by Bethune-Cookman linebacker Joseph Evans on Saturday at A.W. Mumford Stadium.

LSU

Continued from page 1C

Forward Noa Morro, a 6-foot-3 senior from Spain, made her LSU debut after missing the first two games with a shin injury and showed off the shooting touch that made her one of the Tigers' most intriguing newcomers. In 13 minutes, she scored 12 points after shooting 3 of 5 from beyond the arc.

Morro was supposed to miss the first month of the season after undergoing surgery in early September, but because she beat that initial recovery timeline, coach Kim Mulkey can now use her presence to experiment with different frontcourt combinations before the Tigers play their more difficult nonconference games.

"Playing with a big who can shoot," Fulwiley said, "makes the game easier for us guards because they're gonna have to guard both. They're gonna have to guard her on her pop, or they have to guard us on our drive."

The only LSU player who did not see the floor Tuesday was Chloe Larry, a transfer point guard from Tennessee Tech. Mulkey said that the junior suffered a hairline fracture in her hand last Thursday and that she will be out "a couple weeks."

Mulkey played 10 contributors, and they teamed up to hold McNeese to a 20% shooting night. The Cowgirls (2-2) made only 13 field goals and scored just four points in the paint, but they did knock down nine 3-pointers (on 44 attempts) and limited themselves to 15 turnovers — two reasons why the final score wasn't as lopsided as it was in LSU's first two wins of the year.

"They were using up the shot clock," Mulkey said. "It's smart. I was impressed with what they were trying to do. Just use that shot clock up the whole night, and they did."

The Tigers have won their first three games by an average margin of 86.7 points. They're scoring 120 points per game and shooting 58% from the field while limiting their opponents to 33.3 points per game on 20% shooting.

More lopsided wins are likely on the way. LSU returns to the PMAC to play Denver at 6 p.m. Friday, and then it's set to host Troy at 7 p.m. Monday. The Tigers won't hit their tougher nonconference battles until the week of Thanksgiving, when they're scheduled to battle with Villanova and North Carolina State in the Fort Myers Tip-Off.

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TYSON

Continued from page 1C

learning experience."

Tyson said he "couldn't believe" that his first catch resulted in a fumble.

Browns linebacker Carson Schwesinger punched the ball loose as New Orleans was threatening to score, and Cleveland recovered the turnover at the 1-yard line.

Tyson would make up for the play later. As careful as the Saints were to manage his reps early — the first-rounder didn't even take the field until there were 51 seconds left in the first quarter — they trusted him to be out there late. Half of Tyson's 18 snaps came in the fourth quarter, and each of his two fourth-quarter drives resulted in points.

Notably, Tyson was a third-down valve for quarterback Tyler Shough. Three of his five targets came on such plays, leading to two crucial conversions in the fourth. His biggest catch was a 7-yard completion on third-and-5, which set up the 33-yard strike to Chris Olave that paved the way for New Orleans' go-ahead touchdown late.

Tyson's routes revealed how the Saints see his value. They used him on crossing and drag routes over the middle, an area that Shough hasn't targeted frequently this year.

They used him in the red zone, and the rookie even got so wide open on one sequence that he tossed up his arms as Shough took a 2-yard sack.

Simply put, he looked like the missing piece to a wideout group that includes Olave and Devaughn Vele.

"We're going to keep getting him the ball," Olave said. "He's one of our best players when on the field."

Next up

The Saints' most important game to date is Sunday's first-place NFC South showdown against the Carolina Panthers.

This isn't your typical first-place battle.

Like the Saints, the Panthers are 3-5. And like the Saints, Carolina already has made a notable staff change this season, firing defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero late last month.

The Panthers moved on from Evero largely because Carolina has been unable to stop the run. Carolina has allowed more than 200 yards rushing twice this season, and the Panthers rank 28th in run defense, giving up 133.4 yards per game.

That could bode well for New Orleans, which had success on the ground over the weekend in its win against Cleveland. The Saints rushed for 160 yards, led by Audric Estime's 72 yards on 15 carries.

Odds and ends

■ Cam Jordan played just 12 snaps against the Browns, his fewest since Nov. 3, 2024. That game against the Panthers led to the dismissal of former coach Dennis Allen. On Sunday, Jordan played just four snaps — one of which was a kneel-down — after he missed a sack on an unblocked look at quarterback Shedeur Sanders.

■ Moore gave an interesting answer when asked whether he expected Kendre Miller to return to the practice squad if the running back cleared waivers. The coach noted the Saints didn't have an open spot right now. But that was also the case when Moore previously said the team planned to bring back Jayden Price after cutting him. Never say never, but Miller's time with the Saints looks officially over. New Orleans released him over the weekend.

■ Tyler Shough was sacked five times, tied for a season high, against the Browns, but his most confusing sack came in the third quarter when the quarterback identified Cleveland's Myles Harden as a blitzer before the snap, only for Harden to go completely unblocked off the line of scrimmage. How did that happen?

Moore chalked up the play to a "miscommunication," though he did not single out who was at fault.

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