RABALAIS

Continued from page 1C



STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL JOHNSON

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

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.

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.

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

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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TULANE

Continued from page 1C

Tulane played a terrific game on defense (seven sacks, six turnovers) in handing Memphis its lone conference loss on Oct. 16 and was solid defensively a week earlier while holding Army to what still is its season low for points (20). The offense was sharp throughout an overtime win at Charlotte on Oct. 30, and produced late in closer-than-expected wins against South Alabama and Southern Miss.

Otherwise, it has been a season-long struggle, and every weakness was magnified in Saturday's four-quarter fiasco.

"Really it was the opposite of that. I saw a lack of execution, mostly because there was extreme effort to the point of trying to do too much. People were trying to do more than their job to make up for it after it snowballed. We got out of gaps defensively, and on offense we were trying to overcome previous mistakes when we just needed 11 people doing their job."

WILL HALL, Tulane coach on his team not quitting in 60-10 loss to Tulsa

Hall dismissed the notion Tulane quit on either side of the ball after falling behind early.

"Really it was the opposite of that," he said. "I saw a lack of execution, mostly because there was extreme effort to the point of trying to do too much. People were trying to do more than their job to make up for it after it snowballed. We got out of gaps defensively, and on offense we were trying to overcome previous mistakes when we just needed 11 people doing their job."

Asked whether his conversations with players and coaches had been uncomfortable as he tried to fix the issues, Hall labeled them "honest."

"Whether that's been uncomfortable for people is up to them," he said. "I don't know. Honesty is honesty.

"We did not play well. We did not coach well. We have to be better. We will be better."

Redshirt junior wide receiver Destyn Hill, who had a team-high 55 yards on four catches for an offense that went nowhere except very early and very late Saturday, refused to dwell on the past.

"It's really on-to-the-next (game) mentality," he said. "We take accountability for coming up short on any execution issues that we had, but we just look forward to being better the next week. As long as we come in and do our jobs, everything will be all right."

Hall, who was on the staff last season when Tulane reached the College Football Playoff, understands the gravity of the situation.

"Times are tough right now," he said. "Tough times develop tough men.

"This season has not been easy on anybody, but I know our young men are going to bounce back and they are going to play extremely hard this weekend, and we're going to play a whole lot better."

WALKER

Continued from page 1C

And just like that, all that hope and optimism the Pelicans had given basketball fans in New Orleans a week earlier was gone. The Pelicans, who started the season with four straight losses, started figuring things out and won four games in a row. Things were pointing in the right direction.

But now the Pelicans find themselves on the mat again, knocked down by a California combo. First, a body blow by the Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday. Then the vicious uppercut from the Warriors the next day.

The Clippers had lost seven games in a row before beating the Pels 139-123 in a performance Mosley described as "unacceptable."

Mosley's description of what happened 24 hours later against the Warriors was a bit more blunt.

"We got our ass kicked," Mosley said. "No other way to put it. They came in and punched us in the mouth and we didn't respond the right way."

Even though the Pelicans were without Zion Williamson (rest), Trey Murphy (knee) and Trendon Watford (ankle) on the second night of a back-to-back, that was no excuse for the lack of effort on display.

Turns out, Williamson wasn't the only one who got the night off.

His teammates took the night off, too.

The defense, Mosley's staple, went missing. Here is how many points the Pelicans allowed in a six-quarter stretch from the second quarter of the Clippers game through the third quarter of the Warriors game — 39, 35, 37, 35, 37 and 40.

That's a lot of points yielded by a team with a defensive-minded coach.

"It's two nights in a row we've allowed our offense to dictate our defense," Mosley said. "And to understand how we want to play, sometimes you got to get hit in the dang mouth. And we got hit in the mouth twice.

"How we will respond is going to say a lot about us, and that's all of us."

Can the Pelicans (4-7) get back to being the team that had its fans fired up just a week ago? Or are more debacles like the one Monday on the way?

We'll start finding out the answers during a five-game homestand that starts Wednesday against the Brooklyn Nets.

"I'm confident in this group," Mosley said. "It's a fighting group."

You couldn't tell Monday night in San Francisco.

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