



**Weekly Press Conference Quotes**  
**Head Coach Luke Fickell**  
**Aug. 30, 2022**

**Head Coach Luke Fickell**

***Opening Statement:***

“Welcome back, Week 1 is unique to me, and in college football, I know that at any other level, you get to test yourself against someone else, but not in college football. Every year is kind of like this, but to start off with a game like this, on the road in a crazy hostile environment, is going to be unique for us. Having a lot of newer faces, these guys have been here, they just haven’t been the recognizable faces. It’s been a long time coming, I know our guys have been incredibly excited; 24 practices against one another are so difficult, as you get to these last few days [before the game] it is tough to stay focused. I’m excited for them, I’m excited for us, it is going to be a great experience all around...We will have five captains, two guys on defense; Wilson Huber [Graduate Linebacker] and Jabari Taylor [Graduate Defensive Lineman], and then three guys offensively; Dylan O’Quinn [Redshirt Senior Offensive Lineman], Josh Whyle [Redshirt Senior Tight End], and Tre Tucker [Senior Wide Receiver].”

***On the current Quarterback situation***

“Yes [we know who will start at quarterback]. It [announcing the starter] doesn’t do anything good for our team, it doesn’t do anything good for our opponents and their preparations for the game. Last year we didn’t announce the starter, and the year before, we didn’t announce a starter. Obviously, for us, you must have a plan, and you have to move forward. We got to the point of knowing the starter [at Camp Higher Ground]. We obviously wanted to know earlier, but I thought the way those guys competed made it tougher to do, there’s never an exact right time, but it was important for us to get guys the reps that they need. The [two quarterbacks] are different guys, so there is a plan, and you want to do what you do well, so there will be some adjustments depending on what guy is in the position.”

***On what the team has done to prepare for the atmosphere in Fayetteville, Ark.***

“Well, it’s not easy. We can pump music in, and we want it to be loud, but the reality is that you want to have good practices, so there is a balance there. We started last week talking about the environment, talking about the atmosphere, making sure that we are aware of what it is going to be like [in Fayetteville]. It is hard to prepare for. There are a lot of other things that you must prepare for as well, and the atmosphere sometimes gets put in the secondary. After the [College Football] playoff game last year, I didn’t do a good enough job preparing our guys for the atmosphere.”

***On how the teams react to the buzz around campus and the city of Cincinnati.***

“It’s our team. It’s their team. I think they do [feel the excitement], it is something that you don’t want to get caught up in, it’s something that we are proud of, we don’t want to shy away from it...but that is one of those steps, and that is what I wanted to build here...and I remind them, to what is given, much more is expected. They will get to experience what it feels like to be on a campus that has a buzz about college football.”

***On what Coach Fickell knows about the Arkansas fan base.***

“Obviously, I know a lot about them, but I don’t remember much from [2011 Sugar Bowl with Ohio State]. I know that it is going to be loud, I know it is going to be a hostile environment, I know it is going to be one that you want your players to be able to enjoy because that is what college football is all about.”

***On having to line-up against Arkansas QB K.J. Jefferson***

“They [Arkansas] led the SEC in rushing last year...In his growth, I’m sure they don’t want Jefferson to be their leading rusher, but he is very dynamic at what he does. He can throw the ball; I think that he is getting better and better at that. He is a dual-threat guy, and not only is he a dual-threat guy to run, but he is also a dual-threat guy to run you over. The unique thing about it, is that when Quarterbacks are willing and able to run downhill and not just laterally, they put a lot more pressure on defenses...It is hard to simulate that size guy as a quarterback, and you just must be prepared for it. You must be able to tackle well, and you must be able to do that consistently.”

***On how a tough Week 1 matchup will test this team and this football program.***

“There are a lot of things that this is going to test and being a top-10 program is one of them. Our ability to continue to grow, not changing expectations, but being able to attack opportunities like this...We define who we are, we define what it looks like, whether that is success or what we look like on the field. In Week 1, we have to focus on this team, as you get

into the season, the coach talks about the program, as we start, we want to talk about this team, and what 'us' looks like."

***On if he likes to start the season with this tough matchup in Week 1.***

"It changes things. We go into camp doing things a bit differently. I don't know if there was an exact science on how to handle things, [scheduling] is done so far in advance, but it is what it is. Whatever they line up in front of you is what you must prepare for. Our camp was going to be different this year. Different because of the way that we are starting the season, different because of what the first four games look like, but also different because our team is different...These guys are ready for this, and this is a great opportunity for us."

***On if gamesmanship plays a role in deciding who starts.***

"No, I think that it is out of respect for our guys, you take a Deshaun Pace or a Ty Van Fossen. They both played, I think 50% of the snaps last year, and they are coming back playing the same position, that is what gives us a chance to be better in the long run. When those guys can play half the snaps, there is no drop-off, there is no difference. So it is not gamesmanship, it is just, 'hey, we got guys that deserve to be out there for the first snap.' There can only be eleven, but there are plenty of those guys that will rotate on a consistent basis, and that is really what it is about. Because there is a human element to being that starter guy, the guy that walks out on the first snap, but you cannot let that soak into all the things. There are a lot of guys that are going to play significant amounts, if we can play more guys at 50/50 or 60/40 then I think we will be better in game one and we will be a hell lot better as the season progresses."

***On who they will starting at running back.***

"It is the harder position to evaluate and really try to say who is going to be our guy because you do not live tackle, you do not do some of those things, and you need a lot more of those guys in those opportunities and in game one in particular. Obviously, I think, Ryan Montgomery being a returning guy and a senior will be the guy that starts off in there and take that first rep, but there is going to be a lot of guys that are going to be by committee and as you progress throughout the season, I have always said, in that position, in particular, you have to have a one and a two and you have to know who your riding. We have been fortunate in the last four years, to know that and have that, and we do not know exactly what that is yet, it might be like three or four right now which makes it difficult but as you get in the game you got to plan, you have to be able to adapt and adjust but a lot of guys there that deserve some opportunities and that is where we got to grow."

***On if there is any history with Sam Pittman.***

"I don't have a lot of friends, do not have a lot of guys that I call and talk to, but we have never crossed paths. I met him for the first time, I think last year at the convention, great guy but I do not think there is any real connection crossing paths of any sort. Other than being closer

mindful guys that O-line and D-line types of guys that maybe do not get these opportunities as much as some of the other guys.”

***On the O-line / D-line matchups for the Arkansas game.***

“I would imagine they pride themselves in things like that. We pride ourselves in things like that in week one, you are always trying to figure out who you exactly are, and I think it is going to be like that. It is going to be a tough, nasty game, and just like the environment is going to be. We have prepared ourselves for that, that is what the expectation is. If something would change, then obviously, you got to adapt and adjust, but if there is anything, we got a pretty good idea of the type of physical game that it is going to be.”

***On preparing for Arkansas.***

“No, we have been into it now last week was the tough one is when you come back onto campus, and you start school and how much of the Arkansas stuff do you do because if you do too much your like by Wednesday of game week, they are ready to go, can’t be there too soon. The thing that we had to prepare for and think about ahead of time, knowing what kind of game we had game one and I think we did a good balance of it I do not think our guys are to the point where they feel like they just want to play the game they know that there is a lot of work to be done. Even though it is just a Tuesday, it is a Wednesday practice for us, so we are at a good place, and our guys just have to stay focused.”

***On changing expectations with each team?***

“I don't think that there's not a whole lot of change of expectations in the whole program. How you prepare and how you go about things is uniquely different. Not that you got a book on it, because there's not a book on it. It's not like hey, if you play this way in week one, then this is how you go through camp. But to me the uniqueness is how you prepare camp wise, whether what kind of team you got meaning last year was a different camp. You had a lot of guys that have played an incredible amount of snaps and this year was a different camp because we had a lot of guys that were in battles. A quarterback, one in particular that they really needed some high level and more competitive situations and then obviously open it up in a game like this. So it's not the expectation, it's just the whole plan and how you go about it and it starts with camp.”

***On Ja'quan Sheppard's progression.***

“There's a guy that turned everything, been in a situation that's been tough. He's been behind a great player, and even had some of those other failures where all of a sudden, in the bowl game, we moved Arquon over there right before the game. That was a really, really difficult situation for him to handle. I know that was one of those opportunities where he thought this was my time and just the way things had to go. The way things went that time. I think those were all growing opportunities for him. He handled them; he didn't bail, he stuck through it. He

stuck with us. He believed, he trusted us. He's done a really good job all through camp. He's probably been the one guy in the back end outside Hicks that has played a lot of ball in all those positions that you're like, Okay, we're gonna roll these guys and we're gonna give them opportunities. It's been the most consistent he's been at that spot the whole time. And he's never relinquished it. So he's gonna have a really, really big year. He's gonna have a really good year."

***On Ivan Pace's impressive camp***

"Yeah, and I don't know if I knew exactly what to expect. What surprised me more is his ability to connect, his ability to be a part of the group and, the team and the unit. Not that I didn't think he would, but sometimes when guys walk in, especially within our kind of culture and environment, there's a little bit of time it takes for everybody and for you to kind of fit and feel really comfortable, but he's done a phenomenal job and buying into everything that we've done, from changing his body to sub in and rolling, to maybe playing two positions. Probably the guy in the program that's quickest to have gone to the play hardboard, I know he's older, so he's not like a freshman walking in the door. I think Ethan Wright did it in a year and a half. Ivan could have done it at the end of spring, but we held it, and he probably did it within six, seven months. I think that's allowed the team and the entire program to really recognize and accept him. It's been a really good fit."

***On Jadon Haselwood's game and how it compares to former Arkansas WR Treyton Burks game.***

"He's a really good player. Do we know if he's the same thing? Will they use him in the same way? I think those are the things that you're always curious about in week one. They know he's a dynamic player, obviously led Oklahoma in receiving last year. In what ways would they use him? That's the thing you got to kind of figure out. We definitely know who he is, we know where he'll be, whether it's the same as Burks, I don't know that. Maybe you can give me some insight on that, or somebody could ask the coach, and he can let us know. But the reality is, they've got athletes, and they're going to put them in position to get them the ball. And however, they do that with them, whether it's down the field, or whether it's doing a lot like they did with Burke. We won't know till the game."

***On Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner's new sauce.***

"I think I did see something, but I haven't gotten any of it yet. He didn't send it to us, and it should be in our Players Lounge, for sure in the cafeteria that we got back there. If it's not, I'd be really disappointed."