

BULLDOGS-EXTRA

Kirby Smart's UGA recruiting blueprint on display at 2021 national championship celebration

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Kirby Smart was hired as head football coach at the University of Georgia in 2015 and since then has done everything in his power to address a major theme.

Make Athens, Georgia THE place to be.

The first effort to change the tone started in the spring of 2016. Smart tweeted that he wanted to make the Georgia spring game, known as G-Day, a sellout event. Spring games aren't typically must-see events, but Smart, the former Bulldogs player, called for 93,000 fans to file into Sanford Stadium on a Saturday in April.

The fans listened, filling the stadium's capacity seats and more — which later led some to question if the crowd exceeded fire marshal recommendations.

Having fans at a spring game doesn't guarantee a national title, an SEC championship or a game of any significance. But it got fans involved and signified change had arrived in Athens.

Recruits also took notice.

After the fan involvement and awakening of the Georgia spirit came improving already impressive facilities. Once those were in place, the recruiting styles and methods that

Smart brought from his time as defensive coordinator for Alabama in Tuscaloosa were set in place.

Smart's first recruiting moves included a flight cross-country to Washington to keep perennial five-star quarterback Jacob Eason on board as part of the 2016 recruiting class.

His first recruiting win was keeping the No. 25 overall player in the 2017 class in state. A week after Smart was officially named head coach in Athens, five-star safety Richard LeCounte III from Liberty County committed to the Bulldogs. LeCounte's second season in Athens, the 2018 season following the National Championship loss to Alabama, he led the team in tackles. He was in Sanford Stadium for that "93K Day" in 2016. He was part of the No. 3 recruiting class that has since become the standard of Georgia football.

Saturday, more than 90,000 Georgia fans took over Sanford Stadium and Athens for a non-gameday.

Unlike the gathering to see the first look at Smart's Bulldogs' team at a spring game, this was to celebrate the culmination of five years of recruiting, facility upgrades and giving Georgia fans a reason to believe that Athens, Georgia was the place to be.

There were fans in the stands, shaking pom poms and hanging onto every word that came out of the speakers. Recruits and their families sat a few rows back on the field where the 2021 National Champions logo was painted onto Vince Dooley Field. Prospects looked at the stage and saw their dream less than 50 yards ahead of them.

That setup wasn't by accident. It was another example of Smart making the most of an opportunity to showcase the University of Georgia and his beloved Bulldog football team.

Two days after winning the national championship, Georgia got another 2023 commitment to strengthen their future recruiting class. On Friday, Smart and the staff descended across high schools from all areas of the Peach State, all of them wearing "Georgia National Champions" gear.

And Saturday, Smart stood on the stage and called back to that spring game in 2016, while alluding for the future and years to come.

“93K day started right here in the spring of 2016 and you guys answered the bell as fans,” Smart said. “I look across the field over here at a lot of these former players that helped build this program, long before I came and some while we were here. To walk in this locker room today and see guys that were in that 2017 locker room — the lasting memory I have of them, with tears in their eyes following one play. We wouldn't be here today without those same men that came to UGA.”

With Georgia supporters all over Athens lining the parade route and more showing their praise from all over the country, it's safe to say that Smart's blueprint for a national title is safe for years to come.

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