

UAB tabs Dilfer as next head coach

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**
AP College Football Writer

Former NFL quarterback Trent Dilfer, who has been coaching a high school team in Tennessee for the last four years, is the leading candidate to become the new coach at UAB, a person with knowledge of the search told The Associated Press on Tuesday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity

because UAB was not making details of its search public.

Dilfer, who led the Baltimore Ravens to a Super Bowl championship in 2000, has been the head coach at Lipscomb Academy in Nashville, Tennessee, since 2019. He has guided the school to three state championship games, including one scheduled for Thursday against Christ Presbyterian Academy.

He has no previous college coaching experience.

A text message to Dilfer was not immediately returned.

Football Scoop first reported UAB was targeting Dilfer.

A former first-round draft pick for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1994, Dilfer played 14 NFL seasons. After retiring in 2008, he went in broadcasting, working for ESPN as an NFL

analyst until 2017.

At the same time, Dilfer became involved in the Elite 11 quarterback camp for the top high schools prospects in the country.

He moved into high school coaching at Lipscomb Academy, a private Christian school in the suburbs of Nashville. The team is 12-0 this season.

Early in the 2021 season, Dilfer issued a public apology after a video

on social media showed him pushing and shouting at one of his players. The player was the son of a former NFL teammate of Dilfer's, kicker Phil Dawson.

UAB is trying to fill an opening created when Bill Clark stepped down in August, citing back issues.

Offensive coordinator Bryant Vincent was named interim coach and led the Blazers to a 6-6 record this season.

Woods

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at the Hero World Challenge should be getting points toward the world ranking.

He was forceful on the effect of LIV Golf, referring to friction the rival league has caused and how lawsuits stand in the way of any reconciliation.

"If one side has so much animosity — someone trying to destroy our tour — then how do we work with that?" Woods said.

Phil Mickelson was among 10 players who filed an antitrust lawsuit against the PGA Tour in August, a lawsuit since taken over by LIV Golf. Bryson DeChambeau, Peter Uihlein and Matt Jones are the only players still involved as plaintiffs. The PGA Tour since has filed a countersuit. A trial date is tentatively scheduled for January 2024.

Woods said the lawsuits would have to be settled — he used the word "stay" on more than one occasion — or there is no way forward.

Woods is at Albany Golf Club strictly as the tournament host. He had to withdraw on Monday because of plantar fasciitis in his right foot that makes it too difficult to walk over 72 holes, even on a relatively flat course for a holiday event.

Woods said he was posting low scores at home in Florida while riding in a cart. And his next two events — a made-for-TV match over 12 holes on Dec. 10, and the PNC Championship with his son the following weekend — allow for carts.

"I can hit the golf ball and hit whatever shot you want," he said. "I just can't walk."

He said the plantar fasciitis was related to injuries he suffered in the Los Angeles car crash in February 2021, which ended any hope of him playing on a regular basis.

A year ago, Woods was just starting to take full swings with the driver and his ambition was to make it to St. Andrews for the 150th edition of the British Open. He wound up playing the Masters and the PGA Championship, too.

That amounted to nine rounds — four at Augusta National, three at the PGA Championship (he withdrew after the third round) and two at St. Andrews.

Woods felt he was making progress in the months after the British Open, only to hurt his right foot while trying to prepare for a 72-hole event in the Bahamas.

"When you get plantar fasciitis, the worst thing you can do is walk, and I was walking more and more and more, trying to get my legs ready for this event, and I just kept making it worse," he said. "So had to shut it down."

He said he would take a month or two to rest, which won't affect his golf schedule because he wasn't going to play that much, anyway.

This has been coming. Woods turns 47 on Dec. 30, and he has had roughly as many surgeries as majors he has won (15).

"The goal is to play just the major championships and maybe one or two more. That's it. Physically, that's all I can do. I told you that (at the beginning of this year, too)," he said.

"I mean, I don't have much left in this leg, so gear up for the biggest ones and hopefully, lightning catches in a bottle and I'm up there in contention with a chance to win, and hopefully, I remember how to do that."

Lane Kiffin inks new contract with Ole Miss

OXFORD, Miss. (AP) — Lane Kiffin has signed a new contract to remain at Mississippi, the school announced Tuesday.

Details of the deal were not released. The 47-year-old Kiffin has gone 23-12 in three seasons with the Rebels, who lost four of their last five games to finish the regular season at 8-4.

Ole Miss had its first 10-win regular season in 2021 and is headed to a bowl game for the

third straight year.

"Coach Kiffin is establishing a program that can sustain success and contend for championships," said Keith Carter, the school's vice chancellor for intercollegiate athletics. "We are investing in our football program like never before."

Carter cited a "greatly increased salary pool for assistant coaches and support staff," a \$45 million renovation of the Manning center and "tremendous momentum

in NIL."

"We will continue to equip Coach Kiffin with these and the other resources necessary to compete and win at the highest level and build on the accomplishments of the last three seasons," he said.

Kiffin was regarded as a top candidate for the job at Auburn, which hired Hugh Freeze from Liberty on Monday.

The Rebels have gone over 600 total yards in 20 games

under Kiffin, something Ole Miss teams had only done 16 times before his arrival.

The Rebels rank in the top 10 nationally in eight different offensive categories, including rushing yards and touchdowns and total yards.

"With the support from our collective and a new state-of-the-art facility, we will be able to build off what we have achieved so far and offer more opportunities to our student-athletes," Kiffin said.

USC edges Ohio State for No. 4 in CFP rankings

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**
AP College Football Writer

Ohio State was No. 5 on Tuesday night in the second-to-last College Football Playoff rankings, positioned to possibly take advantage if one of the top four slips up on championship weekend.

Georgia (12-0) was No. 1 again. No. 2 Michigan (12-0) and No. 3 TCU (12-0) both moved up a spot, and Southern California (11-1) climbed two spots into the fourth slot.

The Buckeyes (11-1) dropped three spots after losing 45-23 to the rival Wolverines on Saturday at home. That game was 24-20 heading into the fourth quarter and 31-23 with 7:23 to go before Michigan blew it open.

"It was talked about in the committee room that going into, really early in the fourth quarter, the game was still close," said selection committee chairman Boo Corrigan, who is North Carolina State's athletic director. "That being said, you can't completely dismiss the way the fourth quarter ended with Michigan kind of

taking over the game there late."

Alabama (10-2) moved up a spot to No. 6 and was followed by Southeastern Conference rival Tennessee, which beat the Crimson Tide in October.

The final rankings and the four-team field for the College Football Playoff will be set Sunday. The semifinals will be played Dec. 31 in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta and the Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Arizona.

The top four play in their conference championships game this weekend. The undefeated teams might not need to win this weekend to lock up a spot.

Georgia plays LSU (9-3), which fell nine spots to 14th, in the SEC title game. Michigan plays Purdue (8-4) for the Big Ten championship. TCU faces Kansas State, which is 10th in the latest rankings and has already lost to the surprising Horned Frogs.

USC and Heisman Trophy frontrunner Caleb Williams face Utah, No. 11 in the rankings, on Friday night in Las Vegas for the Pac-12 championship.

If the Trojans slip up,

that could give Ohio State a second chance.

Since the college football playoff started in 2014, only one team has moved from outside the top four to inside and was selected to play in the semifinals without playing on championship weekend.

Alabama in 2017 was 11-1 and No. 5, but had lost to Auburn and finished second in the SEC West.

The Tigers then lost to Georgia in the SEC championship, which vaulted the Bulldogs from fifth to third.

Wisconsin was unbeaten and No. 4 heading into Big Ten championship game but was beaten by Ohio State, which had already lost twice and was No. 8.

That left the committee with an opening at No. 4 and it elevated Alabama instead of Ohio State, which finished No. 6 as the Big Ten champion with an 11-2 record.

NEW YEAR'S SIX POSSIBILITIES

Most of these scenarios involve the top four winning out and/or remaining the same after this weekend's games.

Alabama being ahead of Tennessee would mean the Crimson Tide would go to the Sugar Bowl, which is contractually bound to get either the SEC champ or the highest-ranked SEC team available after the playoff has been filled.

That would put Tennessee in the Orange Bowl or the Cotton Bowl, depending on what the Rose Bowl does.

If Ohio State doesn't make it into the playoff, the Buckeyes could go to the Rose Bowl for the second straight season. But with Penn State moving up to No. 8 this week, that opens up the possibility the Rose Bowl could select Penn State, leaving Ohio State to go to the Orange Bowl as the highest-ranked available Big Ten or SEC team.

If Ohio State ends up in the Rose Bowl, Penn State is a good bet for the Cotton.

The Buckeyes in the Orange Bowl against the winner of the Atlantic Coast Conference title game between Clemson and North Carolina bumps Tennessee to the Cotton

against the highest-ranked champion from a Group of Five conference.

The latest rankings pretty much guaranteed that will be the winner of the American Athletic Conference championship between Tulane, ranked 18th, and No. 22 UCF.

No other team from a non-Power Five conference is ranked.

Kansas State is locked into the Sugar Bowl no matter the result of its game against TCU as either the Big 12 champion or runner-up in place of the Big 12 champ making the playoff.

Washington at No. 12 behind Utah puts the Huskies in great shape to make the Rose Bowl as the Pac-12's representative if USC beats Utah and the Trojans make the playoff.

If Utah wins a second straight Pac-12 title, the Rose Bowl would again have some leeway to take another highly ranked team (Washington) instead of having a return trip to Pasadena, California, by the Utes.

Titans need to tweak offense to ease Henry's load

By **TERESA M. WALKER**
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NASHVILLE — The Tennessee Titans must work through some offensive issues to relieve the pressure on both two-time NFL rushing champ Derrick Henry and one of the league's stingiest defenses.

A team that has been one of the NFL's best under coach Mike Vrabel scoring touchdowns inside the red zone had to settle for field goals instead of TDs on three chances in a 20-16 loss to Cincinnati.

Worse, the Titans (7-4) have a much bigger problem.

Entering Monday, only six NFL teams score fewer points than Tennessee's average of 19 a game, and all six below the Titans all have losing records.

Luckily for Tennessee, two of those teams — Indianapolis and Houston — reside in the AFC South where the Titans still sit atop looking for a third straight division title.

"We know that we have to be much better in those opportuni-

ties, and we have been, there's evidence for many years of us doing that this year, Last year," Vrabel said Monday.

"The only thing that matters is what we're going to do against Philly moving forward."

The Titans have to better counter opponents focused on shutting down Henry. Blocking better for both Henry and Ryan Tannehill would help.

"I would say the shots are there," said veteran wide receiver Robert Woods who caught two of six passes thrown to him. "I mean, we just got to click on them."

What's working

The defense. Tennessee may have had only one sack against Cincinnati after taking down Joe Burrow nine times in their divisional playoff loss in January. But the Titans have not allowed an opponent to score more than 20 points in eight straight games, the franchise's longest such streak since 11 games in 1993.

The Titans snapped a franchise record at eight consecutive games without allowing 100 yards rushing to an opponent. The Bengals managed to get to 108 yards.

What needs help

The offense. Their lone touchdown came off a fumble recovered in the end zone by rookie wide receiver Treyton Burks after Henry was stripped of the ball after a 69-yard catch-and-run.

Henry, the first running back in the NFL to reach 1,000 yards this season, was held to his second-lowest rushing total with 38 yards and a 2.2-yard average. He had the best receiving game of his career with 79 yards.

Ryan Tannehill completed passes to seven of the eight receivers he threw to, one a costly drop by tight end Geoff Swaim on Tennessee's first play inside the Cincinnati 20. Burks, who had the longest catch of the game at 51 yards to set up a tying field goal late in the

third, was blocking on that play.

Stock up

CB Tre Avery. Vrabel praised the undrafted rookie out of Rutgers for being "excellent" after being challenged six times by Cincinnati and allowing only one catch on 18 defensive snaps.

"He was probably the best of the group of corners and did everything that he could do with the snaps that he got," Vrabel said.

Stock down

Offensive coordinator Todd Downing. The Titans scored a season-high 27 points in their best offensive performance this season in a 27-17 win at Green Bay on Nov. 17. Downing was arrested hours later on charges of speeding and driving under the influence.

Downing continuing to work during the NFL's investigation and the pending legal process leaves the coordinator's play-calling, and the Titans, open to criticism.

Injured

C Ben Jones has missed two straight games trying to clear the concussion protocol. DL Denico Autry, the team sack leader, missed his first game with a knee injury that knocked him out of the win at Green Bay. Vrabel said they'll see if rookie WR Kyle Philips (hamstring) and OLB Ola Adeniyi can start practicing in an attempt to return from injured reserve.

Key number

29 — The Titans' rank in total offense in averaging 298.8 yards per game.

Next steps

Fix some mistakes and find a way to defend the run better. A unit that had been the NFL's best in winning seven of eight allowed a league-low 60.4 yards rushing in that span. Now the Titans visit the NFL's best team with Philadelphia (10-1) having just rushed for 363 yards in the Eagles' latest win.