

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

University of Mississippi News

---

4-12-2021

## NFL Legend Patrick Willis to Deliver 2020 Commencement Address

Michael Newsom

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews>

---

### Recommended Citation

Newsom, Michael, "NFL Legend Patrick Willis to Deliver 2020 Commencement Address" (2021). *University of Mississippi News*. 3494.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews/3494>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Mississippi News by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

## NFL Legend Patrick Willis to Deliver 2020 Commencement Address

One of the most decorated players in Ole Miss football history to speak May 8 to Class of 2020

APRIL 12, 2021 BY MICHAEL NEWSOM



Former Ole Miss All-American linebacker Patrick Willis gives a 'Landshark' sign as he is inducted into the National Football Foundation College Football Hall of Fame in 2019. He is set to give the university's 2020 Commencement address at 8 a.m. May 8. Photo by Ben Solomon/National Football Foundation

OXFORD, Miss. – NFL legend Patrick Willis, who overcame tremendous adversity to become a scholar-athlete and one of the most decorated football players in Ole Miss history, will give the **University of Mississippi's** 2020 Commencement address on May 8.

Commencement exercises for the Class of 2020, which were postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic last year, are slated for May 6-8. Morning convocation, where Willis will speak, is scheduled for 8 a.m. in Vaught-Hemingway Stadium. Ceremonies for the Class of 2021 are set for April 29-May 2.

A four-year letterwinner for the Rebels from 2003 to 2006, Willis is one of the most heralded defensive players in **Ole Miss football** history. Besides his accomplishments on the field, he also achieved tremendous success in the classroom and the community.

Willis, who holds a bachelor's degree in **criminal justice** from Ole Miss, plans to focus his Commencement remarks on destiny and the strength that comes from lifting others as we rise.

"When I received the call, I had to take a moment to catch my breath and let it soak in," Willis said. "I am truly humbled that the university has invited me to speak at the Commencement.

"Through my commitments, I hope to share a side of sports that most don't see: the nitty-gritty about how intense it is for college athletes to manage sports while also excelling in the classroom."

Chairman Glenn Boyce said the university community is "absolutely thrilled" to welcome Willis back home to address the Class of 2020.

"It's an honor having such an accomplished, esteemed and beloved member of the Ole Miss family speak to our 2020 graduates as they themselves return to Ole Miss for a well-deserved celebratory Commencement," Boyce said.



Patrick Willis

Willis' story is a tremendous example of the power of resiliency, which

### Follow us on social



### Campus Briefs

#### Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

[Read the story ...](#)

#### More Posts from this Category

### Thank You To Our Donors

#### Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

[Read the story ...](#)

#### More Posts from this Category

### Ole Miss In the News

#### Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

should also connect with those who graduated last year, the chancellor said.

"As one of the most decorated defensive players in Ole Miss football history, nothing slowed down Patrick Willis – on or off the field," Boyce said. "He's an incredible force, who has overcome much adversity.

"His Commencement address is sure to resonate with our 2020 graduates who have responded to the challenges of this past year with grace and resiliency."

A native of Bruceton, Tennessee, Willis grew up with extremely limited resources, and by the age of 10 was working full time to support his siblings. At 17, Willis, then a standout multisport athlete, moved with his three younger siblings to live with his coach when his home life became intolerably unsafe. While Willis was a student at Ole Miss, his younger brother, Detris, tragically lost his life in 2006.

Though he was lightly recruited and came from a smaller high school, Willis came to Ole Miss and became one of the nation's best defenders. After injuring his hand, he famously roamed the field with a large cast resembling a club, which allowed him to keep playing, despite the pain.

As a senior, he was a consensus All-American in 2006, when he won the Butkus Award and Lambert Trophy as the nation's best linebacker. He twice led the Southeastern Conference in tackles and was selected to the most first-team All-American squads (13) ever by a Rebel player in a single season. A first team All-American in 2005 and 2006, he was also a two-time SEC Defensive Player of the Year.

The senior team captain ranks sixth all-time at Ole Miss with 355 career tackles, and he is tied for fifth with 33 career tackles for loss. Willis was the recipient of the 2006 Conerly Trophy as the best college football player in Mississippi and the Ole Miss Chucky Mullins Courage Award.

Willis ended his collegiate career as the Defensive MVP for the South Team in the 2007 Senior Bowl. A 2015 inductee into the Ole Miss Sports Hall of Fame, he was selected to **SI.com's** All-Decade Team of the 2000s. The 11th overall selection of the 2007 NFL draft, Willis won NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year during his debut season with the San Francisco 49ers.

Willis enjoyed an eight-year NFL career, in which he made seven Pro Bowls and was voted All-Pro five times. One of the best defensive players of his era, Willis finished his NFL career with 950 combined tackles (732 solo, 218 assists), 20.5 sacks, 16 forced fumbles, five fumbles recovered, eight interceptions and two defensive touchdowns.



After injuring his hand, Ole Miss great Patrick Willis famously roamed the field with a large cast resembling a club, allowing him to keep playing, despite the pain. Photo by Nathan Latil/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

During Commencement, Willis said he seeks to impart lessons to the Class of 2020 about following one's path, even if the route is different from what was expected.

"We each have our unique journey, goals and vision for our futures," Willis said. "There will be obstacles, but by building your strength, you are better able to take the hits as they come, doing a little bit each day to grow, connect and learn. At Ole Miss, students have a huge opportunity to create relationships and other connections to make the path easier.

"Whatever you want to do in life, you have to put your best foot forward. Sometimes it may feel overwhelming or overly complicated, but even if the journey is slow and steady, as long as you are still running the race, you are making progress toward your goals."

Willis announced his retirement from the NFL in 2015, and in 2019 became the 10th former player or coach to be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as an Ole Miss Rebel. He also was enshrined in the Mississippi and Tennessee Sports Halls of Fame and was a Pro Football Hall of Fame semifinalist in 2019 and 2020.

As he works on his remarks, Willis said he's looking forward to returning to campus to speak in the stadium where his legend grew.

"It is a tremendous honor to be invited back to the university to share in the Commencement exercises as a speaker," Willis said. "As the saying goes, 'One never graduates from Ole Miss, for a piece of us remains in Oxford.'

"I look forward to sharing this momentous occasion with my extended family from the University of Mississippi."

Additional details and information will be shared to the **Commencement website**. For the complete 2020 Commencement schedule, see <https://commencement.olemiss.edu/2020-graduates/>.

abate. The Federal Reserve's

[Read the story ...](#)

[More Posts from this Category](#)

