

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

Missouri Tigers

Akial Byers

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Akial, just talk about what you're looking forward to as the 2021 season approaches.

AKIAL BYERS: I'm looking forward to leaving it all on the field with my teammates, giving it my all. I've been in Missouri for five years. This is my last season, and I just want to give it everything I've got.

THE MODERATOR: Akial, talk a little about, you mentioned you've been at Missouri for a number of years. Just talk about the growth of the program and how you feel your team is ready for even bigger success in 2021.

AKIAL BYERS: Obviously, tremendous growth in the program at Missouri since I've been there. Dealing with coaching change, it changes a lot. Players, recruiting, all of that plays a part into changing a program.

So we've really excelled on recruitment, got some good coaches in that knows what they're doing, hard on us coaching. That means a lot into changing a program around.

Q. Coach Drinkwitz said he brought two linemen intentionally here today, A, because of your efforts, but, B, he wanted to show people that if you come to Mizzou and work hard in the trenches, he can put you on TV. What's the message that sends bringing a couple of linemen instead of a quarterback and running back, more attention-grabbing spots?

AKIAL BYERS: I think Coach did a fabulous job bringing us big guys, showing us love, because we work hard and the team goes where we go. Just being in the trenches, it means a lot. We work hard. Big fourth down stop is on us. Being able to come and represent Mizzou, it means a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Can you talk a little bit about this off-season? Last off-season you weren't quite sure with the pandemic; you weren't able to work out normally. How does this year feel a little bit more normal? Do you feel like

going into this season you're kind of back in the groove of what a normal preseason would be heading into the season?

AKIAL BYERS: Going into a COVID year playing football was pretty crazy, all over the place. Everything was a distraction, control, you know. So we had to deal with a lot of other things that went on, and us just putting our head down, continue to play our game as we get through the season meant a lot.

With the season being -- now we got the stadium full capacity, so seeing the fans in there will mean a lot to us players.

We bust our tail every day to come to work and put smiles on their face and see the kids, so it just means a lot to have our season back to normal and a regular season schedule, no jumping around, moving games around. So just a regular season, it's exciting to see.

Q. How different is your impression of your coach now compared to when you heard that he was going to be taking the Mizzou job?

AKIAL BYERS: I think Coach Drink is fitting in pretty well. He loves the media and the media loves him. An impression of him, he's a very energetic guy. He's a great coach. He just did a fabulous job with coaching us up, changing Mizzou, keeping the tradition the same at Missouri but adding his own style and swag to it.

Q. How does working with a defensive coordinator like Steve Wilks, who has some NFL experience, change things? What's it like learning from him?

AKIAL BYERS: It's crazy learning from him, a man with so much knowledge. With him like prior being in the league, he comes to work every day, he's basically explaining to us how the league is, and if you want to play at that level, then you got to do things a certain way and the right way.

So he instills that in our head day by day, and I continue to learn new things from him every day in the meeting room.



Steve Wilks is a great person, a great man, great coach and everything.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Q. You have such a leadership position here this season on the team. What type of advice do you have for the young guys coming on this season?

AKIAL BYERS: For the young guys, I would say just go to work, man. Just get in the playbook for sure, most definitely. That's the biggest part. Knowing what you're doing on the field and knowing where everybody is supposed to be, that's a big part. It's not just a one-man show. It's 11 people on the field. So you just can't make every play. So everybody works together.

Being a freshman, a young guy, you don't have much experience. So when you do get in and you do make plays, those plays were made for you because you were well-prepared.

THE MODERATOR: Akial, you're representing the defense. Tell us a little bit about some of the guys on that side of the ball with you. Who are you looking to have big years, and what should people look for from the Missouri defense this season?

AKIAL BYERS: Our defense, we got a couple transfer guys out of the portal, Allie Green and A.K. and Blaze. Those guys all came out of the portal. They're older guys, more experienced. So we don't have a young defense. We've got nine returning starters on the defense already.

I believe that we have improved tremendously in areas where we lacked at the past couple years, especially on the D-line. We've been busting our tail every week, week by week, day by day, just to improve, be the best D-line front in the country, and I truly believe our defense is going to take off and lead Mizzou to a championship.

Q. Nick Bolton was that linebacker taken in the second round. Have you kept in contact with Nick, and what are some things he told you about maybe just leadership and how to keep the team under control or whatever as you go into this next season?

AKIAL BYERS: You know, my boy, Nick, he was a great leader on the field. He wasn't really vocal like that, but he led by example, most definitely. He showed the way of doing things the right way on the field. He played through injuries. That's the way to do it.

I truly believe that Nick is a great, great player and a great person off the field, and he's put the work in to be where he is right now.