

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 20, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Arkansas Razorbacks Coach Sam Pittman

Press Conference

GREG SANKEY: We're here for me to introduce Sam Pittman, entering his third year as head coach of the Arkansas Razorbacks. Last year they won nine games. That is more than they won in the three previous years combined. So it shows the progress of the program under Sam's leadership.

That ended with a win in the Outback Bowl over Penn State. Arkansas finished the season ranked 21st in the AP Poll, 20 in the USA Today Coaches Poll, the first time since 2011 they ended the season ranked in one of those polls.

For the first time in history, the Hogs captured all three of the program's trophy games. So that's the Southwest Classic, winning at LSU for the Golden Boot, then beating Missouri for the Battle Line Rivalry trophy. Also victory when they renewed what is an historic rivalry with the University of Texas, one we'll see more in the future.

Sam has in his office a functioning jukebox that is real and verified. It's my privilege to introduce the head coach of the Arkansas Razorbacks, Sam Pittman.

SAM PITTMAN: Good morning, everybody. So glad to be here. Glad to be among you all this morning.

I want to thank Greg Sankey. Certainly the best commissioner in football without a doubt. Most knowledgeable. Also want to thank William King. William King has done a lot for me through the SEC office, and certainly appreciate him. Hunter Yurachek, I want to say a little bit about Hunter in that he's a wonderful boss. I say it that way, but he makes you feel you're working with him, not for him. I want to thank him for my contract. He went to work with Jimmy Sexton, with the board of directors. It wasn't easy. It took a while. But Hunter kept working, and I felt like he worked for me, for the university, to make it fair.

In the SEC contract non-compete clause, I wanted that. I wanted to sell stability in our program, and I wanted to



show the state of Arkansas my loyalty to them. With that non-compete, I'm going to be able to coach throughout my career, hopefully, as long as we win, obviously, at the University of Arkansas.

We brought KJ Jefferson today, Bumper Pool and Jalen Catalon. Told the team yesterday if it was up to me, you know what I'm going to say, I wanted to bring the whole damn team. However, we're allowed to bring three. We're represented well.

KJ Jefferson was our leading rusher, leading passer, MVP of the Outback Bowl. He's a returning captain from last season. He's our quarterback. He makes us go. He sets the tone for our football team.

Bumper Pool is what I would call a super senior, coming back, COVID senior year had 120 tackles at his linebacker position. Great leader. Great kid. I believe if he stays healthy he'll be the all-time leading tackler in the history of the University of Arkansas.

Jalen Catalon we brought along as well. He was a captain last year for us. As we all know, he was hurt halfway through the season. Went ahead and had some surgery on his shoulder. He's the leader of the secondary. He gets everybody in alignment. He can run downhill. He'll hit you. Great kid.

I'm excited for you all to meet those three kids. Like I said before, they're going to represent the University of Arkansas in a fine, fine manner.

Just a quick recap. Commissioner Sankey said some of it. Our university continues to graduate student-athletes, Chris Evans, Felicia Saine, their crew, academics, we've graduated 100% of our football athletes who have exhausted their senior year of eligibility ever since I've been there.

Most wins by the program since 2011. Finished ranked in the top 20 in the Coaches Poll. Won four trophies. That was a big deal to our football team, big deal, to have all three of our rivalry trophies. Certainly the Outback Bowl trophy.



No one on our team had ever had one of those trophies. We were fortunate to have all three of them.

We led the Power Five in rushing. I think what that does, it tells us what we're trying to do with our program. We want to be a physical team on both sides of the line of scrimmage. We want to win the line of scrimmage. We want to be physical and tough. To do that, it's hard to do. I was an O-line coach for a long, long time, never was able to lead a Power Five in rushing, but we were able to do that last year.

April 22nd we handed out bowl rings. People ask, Why do you hand out a ring for Outback Bowl? Because I wanted to. Because it's something nobody on our team had accomplished.

You can set goals. Once you reach one, that ain't the goal, that's one of 'em. Once you reach that goal, we're going to celebrate it, then we're going to move on.

That was the last time our team talked about last year.

We have two new coaches in Deke Adams, who is our D-line coach, and Dominique Bowman, who came over from Marshall. Both of those guys are recruiters. Both of 'em are loyal and great men. Our team has received them well. They were both in for spring ball. Both of them are recruiting at a high, high level.

We kept our three coordinators in Kendal Briles, Scott Fountain, and Barry Odom. They're all loyal. They're great coaches. They're all better men. We are one of eight Power Five teams to have a pair of coordinators returning for the third consecutive season. Portal has been in for a long time in coaches.

Administration stepped up and helped us keep Cody Kennedy when others came calling. Jamil Walker, our strength coach, has done an outstanding job with our kids. They work. The purest form of team, go in there and watch your team work out in the weight room. There's no offensive line versus defensive line, there's no linebackers versus running backs, there's none of that stuff. It's a team. It's pure, fun to watch. I enjoyed watching that this summer. Jamil Walker and his staff do a great job.

Challenging schedule again. I think this is the third year in a row, only been here year years, so I know it's the third year in a row that we've been awarded the toughest schedule in college football.

All 12 of this year's opponents made post-season play last year. Our crossover games are with South Carolina and

Missouri. South Carolina, obviously, Coach Beamer has done a great job there. A lot of enthusiasm.

I don't know what tree he's out of, as far as is he with Kirby, Oklahoma, whatever it be. There was myself and Coach Tucker, Dan Lanning and Coach Beamer all came from the Kirby Smart tree at some point. I'm certainly indebted to him.

Beamer has done a great job there. South Carolina comes in week two. They got a lot of great things going in their program. Missouri is obviously our crossover game, which we're trying to make a rivalry. We hadn't won the games enough times to make it a rivalry game. But we're trying to do that.

Excited about our non-conference opponents this year. Week one we play the University of Cincinnati. Luke Fickell is the head coach there. They went to College Football Playoff, AAC conference champions, AFCA Coach of the Year.

Week three we play Missouri State. Bobby Petrino, Arkansas coach, had great success at the University of Arkansas. Has been in the FCS Playoffs the last two seasons.

BYU, they're 21-4. They have two top-20 finishes over the last two years, 20 returning starters. We go to BYU. Then Liberty, they have three straight bowl wins under Coach Freeze. We all know about Coach Freeze.

We have 12 starters returning, six on offense, four on defense, two special teams, with Cam Little and Reid Bauer on the special teams.

We have three superseniors returning, Dalton Wagner, Bumper Pool, and Dorian Gerald.

Portal additions, we had nine. We ended up with two wide receivers, four D-linemen, one linebacker, two DBs. Five of those were at our spring practice. They practiced this spring, of. Four of 'em came in this summer. We expect one of them to contribute to our success.

We'd like our program to reflect our state, the great state of Arkansas. Loyal, tough, hard working. One of our goals every year is to make the state of Arkansas proud of the football team. In my office is a sign that says, You're not coming to play for the University of Arkansas, you're coming to play for the state of Arkansas. And it's true, true to the core.

We've established a true home-field advantage in our stadium because of the state's passion for the Razorbacks.



From 2019 to '21, we were number two in the nation, number one in the SEC, with fan attendance increase of 14,000 fans, additional fans, per game.

Jamie and I are honored to represent the University of Arkansas. Honored to be the head coach at Arkansas. I want to thank all the media for your work in helping us tell our story.

With that, I'll take questions.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You're in a unique situation knowing you were a former head coach, high school level, junior college level, now at Arkansas. How has that helped you in this landscape that we see now, not only the normal recruiting process but also the transfer portal?

SAM PITTMAN: Yeah, I remember being the head coach at Hudson Junior College. They said you had to have 120, 140 kids on your team. I went out west of Kansas, recruited, recruited. At a junior college you're going to recruit 85, 90 kids every year. It's kind of crazy.

Yeah, I've been raised up with a lot of people. That's basically what's portal is doing now. With us, we signed 22 and 9. We signed 31 scholarships, which is unheard of, two years ago, if you know what I'm saying.

Change happens. It just depends on if you're willing to deal with the change or are you going to fight the change. For us, we're willing to do whatever we can to make our football team the best.

Q. What do you think of the job Barry Odom has done there the last few years? How different do you expect the defense to look this year?

SAM PITTMAN: We lost a lot of players off our defense. We feel like we did a nice job of getting some portal guys to help us. Obviously we're advancing the guys we had on our team.

Barry Odom is a key, key part of the University of Arkansas's success, along with Kendal Brown, all our coaches. He's a very, very key part. Especially because he helps me, and he still helps me. I'm a work in progress. He helps me with head coaching responsibilities. I bounce everything off of him still to this day.

But Barry Odom is one of the most loyal, wonderful people that there is in the country. He's unbelievable, loyal to myself and the university. I'm really, really happy that he's part of our staff.

Q. Wide receiver position in particular, if you could evaluate that. Also the role that Malik Hornsby could play on this team.

SAM PITTMAN: Well, I think obviously the unsaid thing there was Burks, losing Treyton Burks. I don't know you replace a guy one for one. I don't think you can there. We're going to have to do it by committee.

I like a couple of the guys we've gotten in the portal in Matt Landers and Jadon Haselwood. I think Ketron Jackson is going to have his best year. I think he's ready to go. Warren Thompson is ready to go. Bryce Stephens has improved.

I like who we signed out of the freshman class. Still yet to be determined whether they can help us or not.

Isaiah Sategna, Sam Mbake, and Quincey McAdoo, they've all had good -- one had an off-season, then summer.

We're going to have to do it by committee. I'll say this. We look like a wide receiver group, we run like a wide receiver group. KJ is going to have to get comfortable with where these guys are going to be. He has to get comfortable with their speed, how they run their routes. That was certainly the number one thing offensively that was concerning, along with Malik, we have used him at wide receiver. He's fast. He has natural ball skills. We need to get him on the field. If he doesn't beat KJ out in fall camp, he needs to be on the field. He's fast, up to 190 pounds now. He can withstand the heat. Hits, physicality.

The other thing that helped us is Cade Fortin. So getting Cade Fortin in at quarterback allows us a little bit to move Malik Hornsby out and look at him at wideout. He's a good enough player he needs to be on the field. He's certainly got a chance to help us there, as well.

Q. What does it mean for you to be a part of the Arkansas athletic department that has been one of the best in all the country across all major sports?

SAM PITTMAN: We got to get better. If you're at Arkansas right now, everybody is doing so much more than we are. We have to get better.

Seriously it's unbelievable. When the basketball team goes to Elite Eight, Dave and them go to the World Series, Courtney and them win the SEC. I could go on. Women's soccer won SEC. Buck and them won the SEC in track. It's unbelievable.

I think you have to look at those individual coaches, you certainly have to look at Hunter Yurachek and his staff. It's a great time to be a Hog now. I think everybody in the state's pumped up about sports. You can see that in ticket sales and revenue, those things as well.

I'm certainly excited to be a part of it.

Q. Are you comfortable saying Arkansas has arrived?

SAM PITTMAN: No (laughter).

Q. Second question, do you want Texas and Oklahoma as permanent rivals?

SAM PITTMAN: Yes. First answer, no. Oh, no, no, no, no. Arkansas is just trying to compete. We're trying to get better. We're trying to fight hard. We're trying to work hard. We're the underdog. We like it that way.

No, no, no, we're way from that.

Now, we will compete. We'll do that. Roll it out there and let's play ball. But, no, no, no, not that.

What was your second question? Oh, Oklahoma and Texas.

It was fun playing Texas last year. Obviously it was one year we had a nice game against them and those things. Have a lot of respect for Coach Sark and the Longhorns.

Oklahoma would be another rival that would be pretty cool, to be honest with you. If we could play Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, that would be really neat.

I'm not the schedule maker. I'm just a football coach. But to answer your question, that would be a really cool deal, growing up in the state of Oklahoma.

Q. The Hog statue on your property, can you explain the backstory as to what led to that. Was that before or after you had a new contract coming?

SAM PITTMAN: I like that last pitch (smiling).

The Hog statue. I bought the marlin house, and big old marlin had a big marlin over here, had a guy catching a marlin over here. The guy over here, he was like this, he was hooking the marlin on the other part of it.

Jamie and I bought it on August 1st. August 3rd the storm came through, knocked the marlin down. Marlin shot water into the lake. So my mind went to a slobbering hog. Insurance company came through. Brandon White was

the guy I called about the hog. I just thought the hog was going to be out there. This thing is incredible, to be honest with you. He's got lights on him, red, whatever color lights you want. The water shoots up. It looks like he's slobbering down into the lake.

That's the story behind it. It's really kind of cool. Boats on parade coming down to the house, they call the hogs. A sign that says, Don't get on the hog. A few people that do. I wish they'd read the sign.

Q. I know you talk about how you like to be an underdog. This is your third year at Arkansas, first time you're not being picked to finish seventh in the SEC West. Doesn't it feel good to be recognized for the success you and your players have had? How has it been different this season where you're actually getting credit from a lot of people?

SAM PITTMAN: I said when I got the head coaching job that the only decisions that I'd make, they would not concern public opinion. That way, if we win, we win as a group. If we lose, I get fired, I get fired because I did it like I wanted to.

Obviously you can't live in a cave and not hear what people say about you or predictions and all that stuff. If that's the only driving force that you have, you're going to lose. If that's the only driving force to be good, you're going to lose.

If we can keep our core values, let's go out-work people, let's out-tough people. Let's be the hardest-playing team in football. I don't know if we are or not. That's the goal. By the way, that's the expectation.

Then whatever people may say, everybody has a mouth, everybody has an opinion. Some of 'em, the opinions are worthy and some aren't.

I'm going to let our football team, myself, drive what we need to accomplish. If we do, the kids and the coaching staff did a great job. If we don't, I screwed it up.

Q. My question is about the defensive line. You like the numbers and the talent there? Dorian Gerald, can you talk about his story a little bit, what he might be able to do for you.

SAM PITTMAN: Dorian Gerald has been there so long, I told him the other day, I think Houston Nutt brought him in. I don't know how long he's been there (smiling).

Dorian, we obviously need pass-rushers. I love the numbers. Actually we're over, to be honest with you, on

numbers there. We've got 20, counting walk-ons. We need some elite pass-rushes. We went and got Landon Jackson. Obviously Zach Williams is returning and Jashaud Stewart is returning. Eric Gregory can do either/or. We signed Jordan Domineck.

We think we can get to the quarterback a little bit more. We also feel a little better with our corner situation where we can play a little man coverage. We've got to get behind them, chains on first down. We did better last year. We have to continue getting better. Having man-to-man corners is going to help you do that.

I feel a lot better. Isaiah Nichols on the inside. Obviously losing Taurean Carter for whatever the period of time it is hurt us. He was having a wonderful spring. But other than that I feel good. Terry Hampton coming in. I feel good about Taylor Lewis, some of those guys. We'll see what happens.

But I think we'll be much better on the D-line than we were a year ago.

Q. You and LSU kind of had a little player swap this year. What are you expecting from Dwight McGlothern, Landon Jackson? What is LSU getting in Greg Brooks and Joe Foucha?

SAM PITTMAN: Let's go with what LSU is getting. Two fine kids. Ones that were never in trouble, gave everything for the University of Arkansas. We're very, very happy that they were on our football team.

They'll work hard. They're good kids. They're good players. Certainly when you go in the same division, it's harder. But great kids, great parents. Coach Kelly got two fine, fine football players.

For us, Dwight McGlothern is a guy we think can play man-to-man cover corner. More importantly, he thinks he can play man-to-man cover corner (smiling). He can. He's long. I like him a lot.

Landon Jackson came over with an injury. Wonderful person, wonderful kid. He's just now healthy. He can run. I mean, he can run run. Long.

We felt like not necessarily from LSU, but we felt like some of our issues were rushing the passer as a defensive end and a cover, man-to-man cover corner situation. Not that we don't have 'em, but we needed more. We felt like we did well with those two guys in the portal.

Q. You brought up the schedule. I don't know if you know this, but you're 16-6 against the spread. I wanted

to say thank you.

SAM PITTMAN: How much?

Q. 16-6.

SAM PITTMAN: Go Hogs (laughter).

Q. You brought up how difficult the schedule has been; you're not in control of it. You're the most likable coach in the conference if not the country. Who is doing this to you in the scheduling? Are there plans to scale that back a little bit moving forward?

SAM PITTMAN: Well, you know, schedules are scheduled out so many years in advance. Nobody knew, maybe they did, but Cincinnati, when they were scheduled, I know they weren't in the College Football Playoff.

BYU has always been really, really a good program. But they're at the top of their game. Well, not top. I think they played for a national championship a few years back. I may be all messed up on that one.

But being 21-4, having 20 starters coming back, I laugh at home saying they're trying to fire me. I hope not. I mean, I like it there.

So I think with the realignment, which thank you for not asking me that question, everything is trying to become fair. Right now the West, if you're in the West, it's a beast. I'm not saying the East isn't. You have that, then play another couple, three teams in your non-conference schedule that are go-getters, it's hard, hard to maintain.

Last year we went 4-0. Somebody said, You're not going to be able to slip on anybody. We didn't slip up on Georgia last year either. I think they knew we was coming in there.

I don't know. One point I'm hoping it will ease up a little bit. But right now it hasn't.

Q. After the beating of Texas last year, what message do you have for the Oklahoma and Texas fans coming over to the SEC? What are the most played songs on your jukebox in your office?

SAM PITTMAN: We love you, Texas and Oklahoma. Can't wait for you to come over. We got a great place. I don't know what to tell 'em.

OU, I was a kid, rooted for the Sooners till I moved over to eastern Oklahoma where I became a Razorback fan. Storied football program. We're having recruiting battles with them right now, thank the Lord. Before we couldn't get



in the door. But we're having recruiting battles. We are having recruiting battles with Texas. I'm not telling you we're whipping them or anything like that. I'm telling you we're in the conversation. It's so close, you know? You have two storied programs there.

But I would tell them what they already know: it's a hell of a league. It's about big people and fast people. Not any different probably than the Big 12. Consistently each week you better have some depth.

Those guys are great coaches over there at Texas, Oklahoma. They know that.

My jukebox, the most played thing, Stevie Nicks. I don't know her. Jamie didn't hear me say that. But I like her. I think Fleetwood Mac. But, oh, my, I'm listening to a four-song rundown right now. If I can do eight, then come back with the top two, I can get my two-mile walk in. That's what I'm doing right now.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time this morning.

SAM PITTMAN: Go Hogs. Thank you very much.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports