

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Thursday, July 20, 2023

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks Tonka Hemingway

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Tonka here, and he's ready for your questions.

Q. I know you missed spring with an injury. What's rehab been like for you? Where are you in terms of being full go?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: It's been real good. I've been in the treatment, getting treatment, exercising. I've been working out. I've been doing most of the runs and everything.

But I'm looking to be out there when fall camp start.

Q. You probably are tired of hearing about the run defense, how can it get better. Looking at your position in particular, what can the defensive line room do?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Like everyone says, it starts with us. In the room, like, we don't mind it right now. If it needs to be us, we'll start it. We working on the run defense techniques, learning to be precise with everything, staying in our gaps.

Q. You're a guy who is from South Carolina. Clemson won seven straight before this year. What did getting that win at Clemson mean for you?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: It means a lot. Especially being, like, a rivalry like that, it means a real good -- got family members who like Clemson and things like that, so getting that win, a good talking point (laughter).

Q. Last year you beat Texas A&M for the first time. What was that like? How much are you looking forward to trying to repeat that?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: That was a great moment. Starting it off like that, I've never been a part of a game where we started off like that. That was a great note, great



way to start. We just got to keep building on that.

Q. You touched on run defense. What were some of the biggest issues last year? How confident are you this group can get to that point?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Well, I feel real confident in our guys, like Boogie, T.J. Nate, our young guys. Even them, I feel real confident. We're working on staying in our gaps. That's probably like one of our biggest problems, trying to make plays.

Q. There's uncertainty about what schedules could look like in the future in the SEC. For a team like South Carolina, is there any game that's guaranteed on the schedule moving forward? Is there a conference game that's really special and you think needs to stay?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Conference game? I definitely probably say that Georgia game. I feel like even the fans love that game. It's always a good turnout. Not that far from South Carolina, so...

Q. What have you done this summer to try to get better? What do you think about the defense moving forward?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I been in the film room a good bit, working on my skills, working on run defense, like, drills, techniques and everything like that. I feel real good about our defense. We've been working hard. We're working on communication right now. We feel we lack that a little bit, and we're trying to get that better.

Q. Nyck Harbor has been working out with you guys. What are your initial impressions?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Yeah, I haven't really seen him. He with the offense. They say he's fast, yeah. Right now I'm faster than him till proven guilty, so...

Q. Being able to work with him the last couple years, what can you say about Coach Day?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: He really helps us on the mental



part. We do a lot of hard things in the weight room. It really tests your mental. Helps you. Sometimes you want to drop out. Being able to stay in it, it helps you out on the football field because there's going to be times you lose a battle, you get knocked off the ball. Coach Day says you got to get back up, keep going.

Q. Important question for you. What have you done to improve your two-point conversion ability?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I guess I'm working on my speed, you know (smiling). Catch the ball.

Q. What's it like playing for Coach Beamer? Where do you feel he's taken this program?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I feel he's taken it to new heights. Playing for him is like you got -- you do everything for him. You try to win. You hate making him feel down. Coach Beamer, you want to play your heart out for him, like give him your all.

Q. What can you tell us about the steps Spencer took as a transfer quarterback to win over the team and the locker room?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I feel like just his competitive ability. That's what it is. He going to compete. I feel like everyone loves that. He throws with the guys every now and then. That's what you got to do to be a quarterback, show that he want to win.

Q. Being in the SEC, you play a lot of the biggest environments, stadiums in college football. As far as away environments are concerned, what is the most hostile environment you've played in?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I probably say like one of the loudest, Texas A&M. Texas A&M a good one. Tennessee can get pretty loud, too, as well. So between them two.

Q. Coach Beamer was talking this morning about understanding that you guys played really well at the end of the year but still had a ton of issues during last season. How easy is it for you to turn the page, not get complacent, try to get better?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: It's real easy. In meetings and everything right now, we don't really talk about 'em. You have to learn that's the past right now. It's a new year. You have to take each step each day.

Q. What was the benefit of growing up in a very athletic family?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Well, you know, we were very athletic, compete. I lost a lot growing up. Growing up, I just wanted to win so I had to work hard. Losing a lot in HORSE, sister and them beating me, running me over, playing football, things like that, so...

Q. You've played both inside and outside on the line. Do you have a preference?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: No, no preference. Whatever the team needs.

Q. What was the difference in those two games, Tennessee and Clemson? Did you have some type of feeling individually to come up with a win?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: I just feel like we was all loose. We ain't played tense. We play more I don't want to say wild, but we was loose. Like we played together and everything like that.

Q. I know you added a couple transfers on the defensive line. Could you speak to their progress?

TONKA HEMINGWAY: They've been doing real good. They came in, they working hard. They're trying to get things down. They come from different backgrounds. They've been working real hard. Putting in extra work, film time.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

TONKA HEMINGWAY: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports