

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Thursday, July 20, 2023

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## Tennessee Volunteers

### Omari Thomas

#### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to go for questions.

**Q. Tennessee, everybody from Tennessee has talked about how the goal this year is to win the SEC East, what that opens up. As a defensive player, taking that next step, how much do you put it on yourself to take the next step?**

OMARI THOMAS: I put a lot of it on myself, just being a leader, face for this defense. I put a lot of it on me. I know it's a lot of work to be done.

We're just never complacent, never just satisfied with what we got to do. I understand just taking the next step, us as a defense, we appreciate every day how much we can continue to grow and continue what we have to do to continue to do off the field what we need to do to be better on the field.

**Q. Omari, is there anybody on the defense that you've seen huge improvements from?**

OMARI THOMAS: Bryson Eason, No. 20, that's my boy. He from Memphis. I'm very excited for Bryson, just to be out there with him, just to see him grow, actually embrace. Came in as a linebacker, but just to see him embrace playing the defensive tackle position is very good.

I'm excited for Bryson and what he can do this year.

**Q. Everyone has talked about the Tennessee offense. Does that add a chip to the defensive shoulders? What may surprise teams and people this year about this defensive unit?**

OMARI THOMAS: No, we don't take it as a chip 'cause we feel like our offense is the best in the country. Us getting a chance to go against it every day, for people to kind of talk against us, we just let it be. We don't really feed too much on what people say on the outside noise.



We come in every day ready to work. We understand that just opens up a whole 'nother level of us being able to play and just continuing to show who we are, playing fast, playing with urgency, being able to go out there and have fun.

**Q. Texas A&M is going to Tennessee this year. What can the team and the fans expect going into that atmosphere?**

OMARI THOMAS: They just can expect a great atmosphere, fun atmosphere. It's going to be loud, it's going to be rowdy. It's a fun spot to play in. Everybody, all my friends who have played against there, who have played in Neyland, what they tell me after the game is how much fun they had playing here. That's good.

All the fans there I feel like they going to have a great time.

**Q. The environment, last year's Alabama game, electric environment, walk me back to that day, what you remember from the game, after the game. Is it all kind of a haze?**

OMARI THOMAS: It's crazy. I remember taking one hour to get from the goalpost the ball went through to the other end to get into the locker room. Took a whole hour just to do that. Taking pictures, enjoying the moment with my teammates, my family being on the field.

It was just good to have that whole atmosphere. The whole buildup to the day was just amazing.

**Q. You've played in the SEC for a long time. Is there one guy or a couple guys that stood out as guys that have challenged you in games?**

OMARI THOMAS: I would say just playing -- not going to lie -- guys every game challenge me. SEC, non-SEC. There's good talent everywhere.

The SEC has the best talent. Playing against those guys when we have SEC games is a good opportunity for me to showcase my talents that I have, showcase their talents.



We go battle, battle for battle, with those big guys, especially in the trenches like that. Amazing to get a chance to go against other good guys, great athletes. It's a whole good atmosphere.

**Q. Is there a player in the league that you emulate or look up to?**

OMARI THOMAS: I try to at least watch Quinnen Williams. I feel like that's a big guy who is athletic, shows he can move, show he can make plays, have fun. Funny guy. I just see myself a lot in Quinnen Williams.

**Q. With some of the violations that came up in the news recently, are there any distractions around the team? How are you handling that?**

OMARI THOMAS: It's no distractions. We have our goal of winning the SEC East.

We allow that to be beyond us. That's not something we worry about, not something we can control. We believe in controlling what we can control, and that's us going out on the field, do what we do, continue to grow as people on the field and off the field.

**Q. Two of those losses last season were games on the road, South Carolina and Georgia. Is there anything you guys have learned about yourselves in terms of preparing so you can be better prepared for the games next year?**

OMARI THOMAS: What we do, we continue to go in every game. We're going to go in every game with our crowd noise. We practice every week knowing that every game that we go to, whether it's home or away, is going to be a hostile environment, it's going to be loud, crazy.

We just understand we need to be able to go in no matter where it's at and lock in, just be able to do what we got to do so we can go out there and put ourselves in the best situation to win.

**Q. Last year you guys had a lot of success. That obviously doesn't guarantee success this season. Is there an emphasis on that within the team?**

OMARI THOMAS: Yeah, we're not being complacent. We understand that everything just has to fall the way we want it to fall. We just know we have to continue to grow.

We had a good year last year, but we have to turn that page. We can't keep living in the past. We understand what happened last year, but we're looking to do big things this year. We're very excited for the first game here in

Nashville against Virginia. That's a good team. We're just looking real forward to playing those guys.

**Q. Do you think the SEC East gets the most credit compared to the SEC West?**

OMARI THOMAS: I think the SEC in general, all around, like I said, East and West, good talent. We get a chance to play people in the East and the West. We have tough games playing both teams.

I feel like the SEC in general is a premier league, a top-tier league.

**Q. Where are you with your Minute Maid pregame superstition?**

OMARI THOMAS: As of right now, I still try to do it every game. I drink the Minute Maid. I know we kind of get time, so I try to do it either before we leave the hotel or once we get to the facility, to the stadium.

**Q. What kind of season do you expect from your long-time friend and roommate Jabari Small?**

OMARI THOMAS: I expect a real good season for Jabari. Hopefully he can put together a complete season where he's injury-free. He understands that's something that he's just been working on a lot, building his health, his endurance.

I'm expecting a real long season and good season for Jabari, just going out there, showcasing his talents, doing what he do, continuing to be humble like he is.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports