

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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South Carolina Gamecocks

Shane Beamer

Press Conference

SHANE BEAMER: Thank you for that. Great to be back here at SEC Media Days for my fourth year. Excited to do here on day one and kick start the week without a doubt. Very grateful still for the position I'm in as a head football coach in the South Eastern Conference, the premier conference in all of America on the field, and then we see each and every spring the NFL draft as well.

It's a destination conference and players and coaches want to be in this league.

Always look forward to going to Destin each and every May for our spring meetings and just seeing the magnitude of coaches, football, men's basketball, women's basketball that are in this league and being able to pick their brains. It's something I always look forward to.

So thankful as I say every year, and will never stop. Thankful for Greg Sankey and his leadership. Knowing him through the years from a distance, but then getting a chance to work with him in the SEC since I got hired in December of 2020, my respect for him has only grown.

Will always be grateful for his leadership that allowed us to have a college football season in 2020. In this new era the college athletics, certainly glad he's on our side and leading the way as well.

And then welcome Oklahoma and Texas to our conference as well. Really neat to see some family media members from my time in Norman, and what a great statement that those two schools have joined us as well.

Appreciate you guys and all you do to promote our game and the sacrifices you make as well away from families throughout the season, throughout the year as well.

Also thanks to SEC staff for putting this on. This is an awesome event. I haven't been to other media days in other conferences, but I can't imagine it's as well-run as this one. There are so many parts that go into putting this



event on, and it's a lot of fun.

I was just upstairs on a bull about 20 minutes ago, and here I am on national television talking to you guys as well.

Before I get started on anything else, wanted to send my thoughts and prayers to Lane Kiffin and his family on the passing of his dad, Monte. Being the son of a coach as well, I know that relationship, and it's a tough time for the Kiffin family. I can remember when Lane went to Southern Cal as the head coach and Monte went with him. I wrote Monte Kiffin a letter just saying hello and introducing myself and telling him how much respect I had for him, and I got a phone call back from Monty Kiffin, which I thought was one of the coolest things, and just spent 20 minutes talking to me on the phone.

Thinking of the Kiffin family and wish them well going forward. Really excited for you guys to get to know the three players that I have here with me today. Luke Doty, Alex "Boogie" Huntley, and Debo Williams, three guys that are great examples of everything that is right about college athletics in 2024.

You hear all the things that are wrong about college athletics. Those guys are what is right about college athletics and what our program is about as well, which is why I brought them here today.

All three guys have been a part of college football since 2020. Luke and Boogie are two guys that been a part of South Carolina program since 2020; are invested in the Gamecocks and guys that have had opportunities to leave, to transfer to other schools or go to the NFL.

All of them have stayed. Most importantly, all three of them are graduates of the University of South Carolina. Luke Doty is a South Carolina native. He is extremely unselfish and started games at quarterback and started games at wide receiver. He is a key special teams player for us as well. Loves the state of South Carolina. As I mentioned, has already graduated and been on the SEC academic honor role every year in college.

Alex, "Boogie" Huntley, another one from the state of South



Carolina, somebody when I was coaching at Oklahoma we tried to recruit to Norman. Fortunately now for us at South Carolina we didn't get him. He's with us. Key player on our defense and been a really key player for us on special teams also. He also has been on the SEC academic honor role every year in college and a returning captain.

So we vote on captains at the end of the season at our place. Don't elect appointment captains before the season. We vote on captains at the end of the season. Boogie was elected a permanent captain by his teammates last season as well.

Along with Debo Williams. Debo is one of the first people we recruited when I was hired as the head football coach at South Carolina in 2020. That was in the height of COVID. Wasn't much of a recruiting class at that point. I think there were 11, 12 guys that we committed that ultimately signed with our program that year. Starting day was about a week after I got hired.

So we tried to hit the portal, and Debo was somebody we connected with. He was at Delaware; transferred down. I remember his very first day in Columbia. He didn't have to be at the facility and in the weight room until 8 a.m., and I walked in the weight room that morning at 6:00 a.m. and he was in there already by himself just working to get ahead and has not slowed down since that day.

Last season, 113 tackles. The most by a Gamecock since 2002. Led the SEC last year with 67 solo tackles. He also is a returning captain, but in addition to that, he's voted on by his teammates our return winner for defensive MVP and first team all-SEC linebacker as well.

You look at our team right now offensively, got a lot of new faces. We've got to replace a lot of production losing Spence Rattler, our quarterback and Xavier Legette, wide receiver as well.

New freshmen transfers that have come in that will make us better, along with four new coach. Wide receiver coach Mike Furrey, Shawn Elliott at tight ends coach and run game coordinator; Marquel Blackwell, our running backs coach; and then Mike Shula we brought in as a senior analyst and works closely with our quarterbacks as well.

I see a lot of eyes that just popped up that don't cover South Carolina regularly that heard Mike Shula is on our staff. Mike has made us better, along with all of those guys.

We did some good things last year on offense. There is no we have to run the ball better and protect the quarterback better than we did last season as well.

We started three true freshmen on our offense last year, and two on the offensive line. Went through some struggles because of it, and we will be better for it going forward.

We're young, we're talented, we are hungry as an offense, and the key will be how quickly we can come together. We've brought in a lot of the production from the transfer portal that will help us do that.

Defensively it's year four in this system under Clayton White, our defensive coordinator as well. We have to continue to grow. We played good defense down the stretch last season. We have to continue to do that as a defense, and we have to continue to be opportunistic on defense as well.

We have led the SEC in takeaways since 2021. Being opportunistic, forcing turnovers, we have got to continue to do that and continue to grow from last season as well.

No doubt in my mind we will. We're better. We have more talent. We have more depth and we have more athleticism on all three levels on our defense than we did last season.

I mentioned a minute ago that Debo Williams was our winner last year for our defensive MVP as voted on by his teammates. Well, the top six vote givers for defensive MVP off our team last year are all back. We have a core group of guys that are returning that have played some really good defense for us and a talented group.

And then special teams, we have to replace our special teams coordinator Pete Lembo. Happy for him getting the head coaching job at Buffalo. Brought in an NFL veteran. Made a grand slam hire in Joe DeCamillis, a guy that has tons of experience in the NFL. Had been a special teams coordinator in the NFL since 1991. Coached in four Super Bowls. Was at the University of Texas last year with Coach Sarkisian. Got exposed to the college game and he realized that he loved college athletics.

Had opportunities to go back to the NFL. We hired him he had two offers on the table to go be a special teams coordinator in the NFL. Turned those down to come to Columbia. So he's made us better.

Return our punter, Kai Kroger, who was with me last year at this event as well, along with our long snapper Hunter Rogers, who will help us, and then excited about the prospects we have at place kicker and the return game also.

No matter who is the coordinator, obviously that's my

background, special teams, and so in many ways we'll have to continue to be aggressive and opportunistic on special teams as well.

We've led the SEC in blocked kicks since the 2021 and have got to continue to do that as well. Really proud of what our guys are doing academically. If you look at our GPAs by semester, four of the eight highest GPAs in the history of the South Carolina football program have happened in the last two years.

So our guys are doing great things off the field; 90% graduation success rate in the league, which is third I believe. We've got 28 players when we kick off on August 31st that will play that game as graduates from the University of South Carolina. 28. And then last semester we had seven guys that made 4.0 GPA; 26 players on the Dean's list as well.

Excited about what is going on in recruiting right now. Obviously got a lot of really good young talent on our football team. The 2023 signing class was the highest ranked class over ten years at South Carolina. If you look at the last two recruiting classes, '23 and '24, ranking-wise it's the best two-year ranking or best ranking over a two-year span since 2012 and '13.

It's a great place to improve. Great academics, an amazing city, the capital of South Carolina, an amazing state, an unbelievable fan base. We were sitting there 2-6 last year after eight games. Came home for four straight home games and sold out all four. Not many team I think are going to do that when we didn't have the season or the season wasn't going the way we wanted last season to.

To sell out the last four home game is a testament to our fan base and how awesome media they are.

Our football operations facility was the best in America in my mind. Upcoming stadium improvements as well. And our staff and administration, led by our president Michael Amiridis, our chairman of the board, Chad Westbrook, our athletics director Ray Tanner. And we have seen what it takes to win championships at the University of South Carolina, led by Dawn Staley, and what Coach Staley and her team have done in women's basketball winning the national championship this year as well, what and Coach Tanner did in baseball, and what many other sports have done as well.

In closing, I know I get every year ranked on the opening statements, and I think two years in a row I've had the longest so I'm trying not to be that guy this year.

I really, really, really like our football team going into 2024.

Most you don't; that's okay. When you guys do your picks or Thursday we'll be picked 14th, 15th, 16th I'm sure, but I'm excited about this group.

We have a lot of really good young talent on this football team with veteran leadership. We have over 20 players on our team that are going into their fifth season or more of college football. We talk about leadership. I mentioned we vote for captain. Of the top 12 vote getters on the '23 football team, to be a permanent captain, which to me there is no greater honor as an athlete to be voted a permanent captain of the teammate. Of the top 12 vote getter last season, seven of them are still on our football team; two of them are here today with me as well.

I understand we have a tough schedule that we get to play. When I look around the schedules in this conference, everybody has a brutal schedule. That's called competition and playing the toughest conference in America as well. If you don't want to play those schedules you're in the wrong league, because that's what the SEC is.

Our culture is strong. It's great hearing from other players when they transfer in from other schools, when they talk about our football program when they get here as a transfer as well.

And then I realized that the climb isn't always smooth. I wish it was like this straight to the top. There will be bumps in the road. Our players hear me say it all the time. You can't have comfort -- you can't have growth without some discomfort.

Mike Tomlin, head coach of the Steelers, who I think the world of and consider a great friend, he has stated that you can't have your feet in both buckets. You can't have your feet in a comfort bucket and a growth bucket. Doesn't work that way.

You've got to be uncomfortable in order to grow. We certainly had some uncomfortable moments last year as a team, but we also showed throughout the season how strong our culture is.

We grew from those uncomfortable moments last year as well. It's truly year to year. The narrative about our program in 2024 is completely different than what it was in 2023. I get that. You see that across this league with other schools here and be coming here this week as well.

But I know this: I love what I do. If you can't have fun at work, you got a bad job. I tell our players all the time that it's hard to outwork passionate people. I love what I do. I'm passionate about coaching football. More importantly, I'm passionate about coaching the University of South



Carolina football team as well.

The job has changed. There is no question it's different and more demanding than it as in 2020 when I got hired. One thing that hasn't changed is how much I love coaching and coaching the South Carolina Gamecocks as well.

We have a championship mindset at the University of South Carolina. Make no mistake about it. There is no ceiling at the University of South Carolina as well. Our expectations at South Carolina are to compete for a spot in that 12-team playoff, year in year out.

We have players that stayed in this program that could have gone to other schools. They didn't stay here to be average and go 6-6.

We have players that have transferred in from other SEC programs and Power 5 programs. They didn't come here to be average.

We have coaches that have come in from other teams that did not come here to be average.

We have coaches that stayed that turned down opportunities to go to the NFL and other Power 5s and SEC programs. They did not stay here to be average.

The expectation at our place is to compete for championships and be in the mix for that 12-team playoff. That's what we're working towards each and every day. We've got a great group of guys doing that back in Columbia right now.

Couldn't be more excited about kicking things off on August 31st. You win with people and win with great people. We got a great group of people in our program, and can't wait to get started with them the first week of August as well.

We're just getting start as a program. I truly believe that. Excited for the year.

With that, any questions?

Q. Shane, you'll be traveling to Oklahoma this year. Curious how you and your family are looking forward to that. What do you remember about your time at OU?

SHANE BEAMER: For me it's a work trip. My kids are disappointed it's an early kickoff because they were hoping to have a full Friday and a full Saturday of seeing all the things, people and places back in Norman.

I had a great time there. Got great friends there. Literally

just got a text message about an hour ago from Ryan Hybl, the golf coach, telling me we need to get together as families and figure out a plan to when our families come to Norman.

I didn't want to tell him I'm a little busy today in Dallas. We'll talk about that. Fortunate or thankful that Coach Riley gave me an opportunity there. I had a great job at the University of Georgia with Kirby and learned so much in my time there.

The opportunity to get connected and be with the Oklahoma program was a great opportunity. Went there because of for a lot of the reasons. For a lot of reasons. Joe Castiglione, the athletic director, was one of them, to get connected with him. Just went there and made so many friends for life. I mentioned Ryan Hybl. Zac Selmon, Mississippi State, someone that's a dear friend. I learned a lot. Pretty cool being a part of that tradition, and it'll be a big challenge going back to Norman on that Saturday. Really looking forward to the trip.

Excited for our fans. Our fans are so excited about going to Norman, Oklahoma. I can't tell you how many have come to me and told me they got their flights booked and what do they needed to and where to go. It will be a fun weekend and work trip for us.

Q. Talk about the quarterback situation going from Spencer Rattler to I know you haven't officially named a starting quarterback, but LaNorris Sellers kind of presumed to be the starting quarterback there. What do you see as what he can bring to the table and how is that different from what your offense was a year ago?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, obviously got to replace an elite player in Spencer, and I know he's doing great things in New Orleans already and is going to have a long career in the NFL. We certainly are going to look different at the quarterback position and LaNorris Sellers and Robby Ashford, both guys that are 240 pound guys that can run and are able to throw equally as well.

So it brings a new dimension to our offense. Those guys have made each other better. Luke Doty, who is here with me today. Luke started games at quarterback back in 2020 before I was hired at the head coach when I was coaching at Oklahoma.

So we have experience in that room. We don't have a ton of experience starting at South Carolina. But Robby has SEC experience and LaNorris has played in some games last season. We return a lot of players around those guys which will help. Starting on the offensive line, a guy like

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Vershon Lee, who because of our injuries on the offensive line last year, he started at center, guard, and tackle.

On the offensive line, we bring back Vershon, that will help a young quarterback, having a veteran offensive line. Ja'Khi Moore, been here since 2020; played multiple positions on the offensive line.

So we have had obviously since January to kind of create what this offense is going to look like. Got a lot of new faces. It's a young, but extremely hungry and talented group.

Q. You're probably in the best spot to answer this having coached at Oklahoma and now in the SEC. What the biggest adjustment do you think faces Oklahoma jumping to this league?

SHANE BEAMER: I think it's a couple things. One, on the field and another one off the field. From being in other conferences -- and I've coached in multiple leagues in my career -- it's the size and the depth and the athleticism you see on the line of scrimmage every single week in this conference.

I can remember being at Oklahoma, coaching tight ends, and you would be getting ready to play most Saturdays and there may be one or two guys on the opposing defensive line that you really got to be cognizant of. Like this guy can completely wreck your game if you don't have a plan for him.

But then you come into this league, it's not one or two, it's like six or seven every single Saturday on the line of scrimmage. That's one thing.

The other part off the field, and it's awesome, is just the venues that you go into this in league. Being able -- like every single Saturday it's an event in that town. There is 80, 90, or 100,000 people every single Saturday in this league.

There is nothing like it. Just the competition, pageantry, it's special. It's something I missed when I was not in this conference and coaching in other conferences, and excited that I'm still part of the SEC.

And don't get me wrong, Oklahoma and Texas have played a lot of big time football games and are two big time programs. But to answer your question, just the difference and what to expect, those are two things that stand out to me that I think are a little bit different than other conferences.

Q. You're at a program that's trying to build and reach

the Alabamas and the Georgias. Then they add in an Oklahoma and Texas, two more programs from my perspective you got to leap over. How does that make your job tougher? And as a coach do you say, what the heck are you doing here?

SHANE BEAMER: No, I think it's great. It's a testament to Commissioner Sankey and our league that Oklahoma and Texas want to be a part of this conference, for one. Competition is a core value of your program and we're all about competing.

You want to compete against the best. You want to coach against the best. That's what you get to do in the SEC. I can't spend a ton of time worrying about the other teams in this league. For me, and I know it's cliché, it's doing the very best job I can every day for our program and trying to continue to move it forward.

Recruiting, player development, our staff, you name it. How do we get better each and every day. That's all I'm focused on. I'll say this, too: We ain't far off. We've had some fantastic wins over the last three seasons over teams that when you talk about -- when you guys do your predictions or the media and people nationwide do predictions of, okay, here is what we think the 12-team playoff is going to look like this year, there are teams that are considered to be in the mix for that playoff that are teams that we have beaten in our three years here as well.

So that's the one thing we got to do, build and compete and get better each and every day and continue to put yourself in the mix for that -- for a spot in that playoff. And we're in a conference, too, the depth of this league is unmatched. If you're one of the better teams in this conference, you're going to be in the playoff. We've shown that we have the potential to be that over the last few years.

Q. Coach, going back over those off-season narratives that you mentioned, the negativity, outside the top 25, what will it take to get Gamecock football back to that late 2022 scenario?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, I think just continuing the work. You know, I get it. 5-7 last year, Brad, is not what anybody expected. We were here last year and somewhat of a feel-good story, and some of you guys were picking us to be a dark horse team in the SEC.

We went 5-7. Ultimately that's my responsibility. But I also look at it that we weren't that far away from the narrative being completely different as well.

When the season is over, like every head coach, I sit back



and look at everything that we're doing and where do we need to tweak, adjust, be better. Feel like we've done that, whether it be how we do things in our building each and every day, coaching staff, players we brought in, players that left our program in some ways as well.

And just continue to say, okay, how do we be better, and then realizing that in college football there is more parity than ever, but in this league especially, Brad, it is a thin, thin, thin line, and I'm not going to sit here and woulda, coulda, shoulda, hindsight being 2020 but I can think of two or three plays off the top of my head that if literally last season we just do what we're supposed to do we probably win the football game.

That's my responsibility as a head coach because we didn't and it starts with me. But I know we're not far off, and for us to get back to -- you alluded to the '22 season, beating Tennessee and Clemson when they were top 10 teams back-to-back weeks.

It starts with having good players, and a lot of guys that were a part of those two wins are still in our program. We've got a lot of guys that have come back in '24 because they know that we are better than what we showed last season. They are -- somebody told me earlier Debo said we're not hungry, we're starving.

The way they've worked since January has shown me that. We can't sit here and talk about it. We just got to work. But I know we got the right group of people in our program and we are very hungry and eager to get going.

Q. Rocket Sanders, he had shoulder surgery and a knee issue at Arkansas. Could you give us an update on him and what are your expectations for him this season?

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, one of our strength coaches the other day said what we've done with Rocket or what Rocket has been doing since January is Rocket science. I thought that was funnier than I think you guys did.

He has come in, and you talk about hungry, starving, Rocket is very hungry to get back to the Rocket Sanders of '22. I think a lot of people have forgotten how talented a running back Rocket Sanders is and the season he had in 2022. There is no doubt in the 2022 season the two best running backs in this season was Judkins at Ole Miss and Rocket Sanders.

He will make our run game better along with the other running backs we brought in. He's done a great job. Came in in January. He had to get healthy. He's worked really, really hard to get healthy since then. Been a

process with our strength and conditioning staff and training staff.

He's shaved six percent of body fat off his body since February. Lost a considerable amount of weight. He stayed in Columbia the whole month of May when most of our team has left. Outside of offensive line. Our offensive line stayed in May voluntarily. Rocket stayed up there on his own so he could be in ideal shape when our players came back in June.

The rest of the team as well. He's done a great job. He's I think 230, 228 pounds as of a few days ago if I'm not mistaken and is having a really, really good summer. He's worked closely with our strength coach, Jamil Walker, who was his strength coach at Arkansas; Chip Morton, who was a long-time NFL veteran, one of our associate strength coaches, Luke Day, our head strength coach, training staff, nutrition staff, Rocket, everyone had a hand in it, and appreciate our administration giving us the resources we need to help not just Rocket, but all of our players be their very best each and every season.

Q. I believe for the first time in the 2024 recruiting class since perhaps your first, you took more transfers than high school kids. Curious if that makes any statement or provides any message about your roster at all?

SHANE BEAMER: No, I don't think so. We always want to start with the high school recruiting first and foremost. We'll never deviate from that. We had a really good year in my mind from a high school recruiting standpoint.

The great thing that will help us this year as I mentioned last season, we started five true freshman. Well, three of those guys didn't get to Columbia until the summertime; whereas ever signee in our recruiting class this past year, all but three went through spring practice with us.

So that will help our youth as well. I love the recruiting class that we put together maybe number-wise it wasn't very big, but like I alluded to a minute ago, the last two years have been the best two-year span of the highest ranked recruiting classes in the last two years since 2012.

We went head to head against some of the best teams in the country and won battles to get guys to South Carolina. You look all across the battles that we won, it was a smaller class, maybe number-wise.

But to answer your question about relying on the portal, to me it's really where we were. Receiver-wise when we lost a first-round draft pick in Xavier Legette. We needed to replace him, we are very young. We needed to get some

production, experience in there. We did that.

If you look at our defense last year, defensive line or Top 3 -- Top 4 tackles all returned. TJ Sanders, Boogie Huntley, Nick, Barrett, and Tonka Hemingway. They got worn down last year because we didn't have a lot of depth. We brought in some transfers that have played in the SEC that will help us be better there. Same thing at linebacker. We've had a three-man rotation at linebacker last year. We've added some freshmen that will play for us this year, but also added some transfers from Power 5 schools that will help us up.

Really to answer your question, really for us just getting more depth at every position and getting some experience as well at every position.

And I like it when you talk about the young talent with the freshmen we brought in and then combine it with the experience from the portal that we brought in. It's a really fun group that has done a great job of laying a foundation for not just this year but for the future as well.

Thank you guys so much. Have a great week.

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