

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Tennessee Volunteers

Arion Carter

Press Conference



Q. This Tennessee addition of their defense, what can you tell us about it?

ARION CARTER: We have a whole new bunch of guys to add to our repertoire, I feel that bring assets in different ways. You have a guy like Colton Hood who brings a lot of speed, a lot of quick decisiveness in run/pass, who I feel is very good in run-pass defense.

And you bring guys in at corner and a lot of our young DBs who are willing to learn, who come to work every day that have the right mentality, who came and adopted our culture and who are fitting in very, very well.

Q. What have you guys been doing in the offseason to make that next step and get into that conversation, not only conversation, but that opportunity to play for an SEC Championship? It always has to be something that you have to do differently to make that next step. What has the team been doing in the offseason to get themselves ready for that?

ARION CARTER: I feel like we've just approached the offseason with a different level of preparation. We realize that we belong here, playing at a championship level in the SEC. And just as a whole, I feel like we just needed to set ourselves apart by working very intentionally through our preparation and our work habits to set ourselves apart from everybody else in the SEC, in our conference and in the league.

Q. What are the most pleasing aspects of last season and how much do you have to put in the past to get ready for the future?

ARION CARTER: A lot of pleasing aspects is seeing the growth we made as a team. I feel like we had a lot of young guys step up last year, offensively and defensively, that are ready to take on leadership roles this year.

And I feel like there's guys defensively who have already

been in leadership roles, including myself, that were able to expand upon their leadership roles and be able to take it to a whole other level, bringing our new guys in, our newcomers in to go compete at a championship level.

Q. Just given everything that happened in the spring, with Nico, how different and how, for lack of a better term, weird was this offseason, especially coming off a playoff trip?

ARION CARTER: Having a guy like that leave with such character and such poise was a hard thing to do, but nobody's bigger than the program. We wish him the best where he is at. And I hope he has a great career and goes on to do great things.

I feel it didn't waiver from the agenda we had to step forward and do, especially with the new guys we have set, with the three quarterbacks in our room, with George, Jake and Joey. I feel we were able to crowd around those guys early and get those guys ready and prepare them over this course of these last few weeks.

And these next few weeks going into fall and training camp for this 2026 season I feel very well where we're standing, but we have a lot to do and a lot to prove still.

Q. When you play the linebacker position in this pass era, what's the most difficult for you at the linebacker position? You're one of the leaders tackling last year for Tennessee, but what is the most difficult responsibility playing the linebacker position for you?

ARION CARTER: You are the quarterback of the defense, per se. We are the glue that holds all three phases of the defense together, with tying in the front and having great communication with the back seven.

You want to always be able to have a clear, concise communication. That's something that's hard within this game, that offenses have made it hard to do with a lot of fly motion and shift and treys.

But have you to be able to adapt on the run and be able to roll with the punches. I feel I've been able to do it very well



and make decisive and quick decisions. I have to build on it going into this season to make sure we have a great standing for this SEC play and for this 12-game schedule.

Q. We saw glimpses of how dynamic Boo Carter was last year. What impresses you the most about him and what kind of growth have you seen from him, specifically in the offseason?

ARION CARTER: A young guy like that who is so explosive that's able to be dynamic on all three phases of the game of defense, special teams and offense. Just being able to have a guy like that that's like a Swiss Army knife, in my opinion, that you can put him anywhere in the field, that's a playmaker, it's such a great blessing to have a guy like that that's going to be young, talented and still growing as a player, as a young man who is going to have a great future for us, who is able to make big-time plays for us in big-time games for us.

I'm so pleased where he's headed and the growth of our younger guys and young playmakers. And I'm ready for the season.

Q. It seems like Tennessee has more rivals than probably any other team in the Southeastern Conference -- Kentucky, Vanderbilt, Alabama, Georgia, Florida. There's talk about circling games. Do you circle a game or games?

ARION CARTER: I circle the next game, per se. And that might be cliché to say, but I feel like in this league, with such high talent and one of the best conferences in America, playing at this level I feel you've got to be on your Ps and Qs at all times going into each game week and each SEC play week.

I feel there's nothing like it. It's nothing more than the competition. There's nothing like the competition. There's nothing like the excitement. There's nothing like the fans. And just the overall level of play that I'm grateful to be a part of and go out and do every single day.

Q. You touched on him earlier. What do you think about Colton Hood so far, and what stands out most about his game?

ARION CARTER: A guy like Colton, very smart, a guy with experience. Him coming from Auburn and coming from Colorado. A guy who has been in big-time games who has played in the SEC before who has games-like experience.

It's great to have an addition like him to our secondary. A very young talented secondary group that he is able to come in and bring his experience and talent level to

expand upon the talent and the knowledge that we have to go out and win ball games for us. I can't wait to go out there and play with him.

Q. You mentioned rivals, Vanderbilt is obviously one of them. Diego Pavia recently said they're going to run the state of Tennessee. As a Tennessee kid, do you have a reaction to that?

ARION CARTER: I don't play too much attention to offseason comments. I feel that's why we have the season for. We're going to be prepared when that time comes to go seize the opportunity. That's what you look forward to the season for.

Q. You mentioned Joey. I know he came in sort of late in the process this summer. How much interaction have you had? And just as a defensive player, what did you see from him, maybe whatever practices are throwing, activities that he's been a part of?

ARION CARTER: When he first got here, I made sure, as being the leader, one of the leaders on the team, I wanted to get with him and make sure we had a clear understanding of the expectations set for him, but the expectations he should have for us, and to make sure we don't waver from those.

Once we got that all figured out, being able to sit down with him, we all had an occasional meal with the quarterbacks and linebackers and special teams, just having a guy like that in your room and having a guy like that in the building is such a great opportunity that we have.

He's such a smart guy, very poised, very calm, collected dude, that I wouldn't change anything for the world to have him on our team, alongside with my other two young quarterbacks that he's able to go coach up with George and Jake.

Q. What would be some of the skill set you'd like to tell the Tennessee people Joey Aguilar, and what do you tell a young linebacker that's going to be part of an SEC defense at Tennessee, what's some advice you give them?

ARION CARTER: Just a few things about Joey. Like I say, he's a very great, decisive decision maker, very good with the ball in his hands, takes care of the ball. Very good game manager, from what I've seen, as far as the few practices we've had with him.

He's very good with using his legs on the run. I feel like he can make time and create space outside the pocket with his feet and expand throws.



And I feel like just him overall as a leader and the experience he brings is just once-in-a-lifetime that we're able to have. And I'm grateful to have a guy like that in the room, an older guy to be able to corral the young guys like Jake and George.

What I would say for a young linebacker going into the SEC is have confidence, be prepared and trust what you're seeing and see what you know. And be slow until you go. And make sure that your preparation, your level of preparation is so high that when you're able to go out for game time, it's like you played the game a thousand times before just because of your level of preparation, you have so much confidence, you can go out there, play fast and free.

Q. Seems like we've seen a lot of SEC rankings and national rankings that don't have you guys ranked all that high for a team that made the college playoff last year. What do you think of that? Is that something you've discussed internally, do you feel the bar's been lowered a bit too much?

ARION CARTER: I feel like I don't really pay too much close to rankings. I feel like that's what we have the season for. I feel like I know what we have in that room and I know we have on our 105-man roster, and I know what our expectations and what our goals are set to go do.

I know that we have full ability and capability to go out there and achieve the goals we set.

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