

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Georgia Bulldogs

Mike White

Men's Media Day Press Conference

Q. You're one of six coaching changes in the league. That used to be kind of the norm for football, and plus you changed within the league, and football coaches do that all the time. What do you think the heavy turnover and new mood within the league says about basketball, and maybe there's a lot of emphasis on it now, but also that adds pressure. What do you think about all the coaching movement?

MIKE WHITE: Well, a lot of thoughts you threw at me there and a lot of things to answer, I guess. We're all chasing football to a certain extent, right, just like we are at Georgia. We're trying to replicate what Kirby and those guys are doing, having an amazing run, of course.

But it happens. Turnover throughout our league and many leagues throughout the country. You've got proud fan bases and you've got great opportunities, great programs.

Our institution is very unique. It's got a lot of promise academically. It's a great college town. It's a hot athletic department, and it's a destination where a lot of people want to be.

Happy to be at Georgia and very, very blessed. Excited about going to work every day in Athens.

Q. Poll came out today, you guys were picked 13th. I'm not sure if that was a huge surprise or not, but how are you guys going to use that as motivation, and what do you think about that?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, I'm not into that. I'm into the opposite of it, for us to preach as a staff every day about negating external noise and the poison and so on and so forth, running our own race, not worrying about what other people think.

That goes both positively and negatively, whether we're



picked in the top 2 or 3, whether we're picked in the bottom 2 or 3. For us it doesn't matter. It's about growth. It's about getting better. It's about becoming the best version of a team, individually, as well, and let the chips fall where they may.

Who knows where this team will be competitively in a few months, but I know if we're focused on preseason rankings, we're wasting our time.

Q. You talked a few weeks ago about how there's so many different institutions now represented at Georgia, all the transfers, obviously yourself and the assistant coaches. How have you seen this team come together, and have there been efforts outside of basketball of getting together and building a bond with these guys?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, we've done some team-building stuff, through physical activity at times and Collin Crane, our strength coach, does a tremendous job, and he's put our guys in a couple of those situations. We've watched a couple of movies together. We've had some meals. We've had the guys out to the house, typical stuff, nothing out of the ordinary.

But we've got a ways to go to find out exactly who we are, just like every other team in this league. We're coming off an inter-squad Saturday where we weren't particularly good. I'll tell you, I thought we were pretty good yesterday, and Friday I thought we were pretty good.

Through some trial and error, through some video, through some adversities, we'll find out where this team needs to grow and how much we can grow.

Consistently, though, I've liked our work ethic, our competitive spirit in practice. I think we're a team that's got pretty good depth. I think we're a team that has a pretty high level of athleticism, and, again, competitiveness.

That said, we've got a ways to go to figure out how to win at this level, and that is a learned skill. How do you win at this level? We don't have many guys on our roster that have consistently won in a big role at high major basketball.



Q. There's a couple of big-picture things for college basketball, kind of some movement on them right now. I wondered your thoughts on this summer basketball idea and also the buzz that maybe some folks want to expand the NCAA Tournament field.

MIKE WHITE: All for both. I don't know how much I should really get into it. Probably a lot of details I'm not overly familiar with. But as much basketball as our student-athletes can be playing, as much exposure that our league can be getting, I think it only helps.

Yeah, I'm all for it. All for it.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Arkansas. Just what have you thought of the job that Eric has done there and what are some of the challenges when you face his teams?

MIKE WHITE: He's done a tremendous job, obviously, scoring. Scoring is the biggest difficulty, of course. They've been good offensively. They've been solid. They value the ball. They take good shots, all that kind of stuff. But I think they've turned into one of the elite defensive programs in our league. And our league is, in my opinion, the best defensive conference in college basketball, and Arkansas is right up there with the best defenses.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Dennis Gates. Obviously you went up against Florida State a couple times while he was on staff there. What do you think he's going to bring to Missouri this season?

MIKE WHITE: Well, he was a tremendous assistant for a long time, of course, and had a great run at Cleveland State. He's a great addition, like a few others, to this league. I anticipate Missouri being a very good program. It's a proud history and tradition like so many others in this league.

Q. Mike, when you were hired, there was a lot of talk about recruiting in the state of Georgia, high schools, AAU. What have you thought about the progress you guys have been able to make as a staff just in the first few months?

MIKE WHITE: Literally as we were pulling up on the van that we had to ride to from the airport, I got off with a high school coach from the state of Georgia. We're going to continue to recruit the state really, really hard. Most of our league recruits the state of Georgia really hard, for obvious reasons. It's as fertile a recruiting state as there is in our country. Arguably the best AAU programs and coaches and high school programs and coaches in the country, and we're fortunate to have that opportunity. It's right there in

our backyard.

That doesn't mean we need to have 13 guys from the state of Georgia. It might mean we have four or five one year. Who knows. We need to get the right guys. But we need to recruit and evaluate our state, and we're doing so as hard as anyone in college basketball.

Q. One of the new guys you brought in, Terry Roberts, a senior, a lot of experience. What has he brought to the guard position? How has he taken the team and tried to lead them?

MIKE WHITE: Terry is a talented kid. He's Missouri Valley, Newcomer of the Year, if I'm not mistaken, put up really good numbers, had a very good year. And that was his first year at the Division I level, coming from junior college like Kario Oquendo last year at Georgia. And now he'll make another jump. Kario has made the jump to high major basketball. He's got a year into that transition, and Terry will make it here this season.

Ultra competitive, tough, hard-nosed point guard that it starts with him on the defensive end. Got great length. Very, very good passer. He's a guy that we'll challenge daily to lead.

He's got some leadership capabilities. He's got some winning characteristics.

Q. You had a new program now; is there any changes you're going to make to your system, any tweaks you might make at the University of Georgia that you didn't have at the University of Florida?

MIKE WHITE: No wholesale changes. Year in and year out, all seven years at Florida, we would make tweaks, and same thing at Louisiana Tech for four years. We had a good run there late at Louisiana Tech where we had a lot of continuity with the same guys coming back and maybe a little bit less then.

But in year one, probably, as much as -- at least optimistically thinking, as much as you'd like to make, and then you find some continuity with some success hopefully down the road, that's the goal, of course.

But some changes based on who we are, our roster makeup. I spoke to our athleticism a little bit earlier. I think we can extend a little bit.

I think that this team can be pretty switchable defensively with some length and some athleticism. We talked about Terry Roberts, his size at the point guard position. He's only 6'3", but he's got elite length.

So those are some changes in terms of how we played last year at the University of Florida, of course, and then obviously wholesale changes, two completely different programs in terms of last year's Georgia to this year's Georgia.

So we'll see.

Q. What have you seen since you've been to Athens that's reinforced for you that this was the right move?

MIKE WHITE: There's a lot of pride in Athens. Every person you run into wants to talk about how excited they are for Georgia to get going, to really get going, and how much promise we have and the hospitality has been incredible to my family and I, our staff.

Just the excitement. Again, we talked about the momentum in the athletic department. Probably overall what's been most exciting is throughout the state recruiting the state of Georgia, you hear this whether or not you're talking to an alumnus or a Dawg fan. You hear it from other people, too. Why would we not want to see Georgia be successful? Why would we not want to drive 45 minutes to Athens to see our guy play or to come see the red and the black and be in Stegeman when it's rocking.

I just think that it's prime to happen. I just think that there's a lot of excitement throughout the state, again, whether you're talking about Bulldogs or you're talking about just your average basketball fan for Georgia to get going, for Stegeman to get rocking, as it was a few times here this past season.

Georgia had a tough year, of course, but the one game that sticks out in my mind is Auburn at home when it was absolutely electric, which showed the promise of a place that really wants to see it happen.

We expect Stegeman to be a great environment and home-court advantage for us.

Q. I wanted to circle back to the high coaching turnover. What was it like in the spring meetings? I guess you guys met together, seeing all those new faces. You've obviously been in the SEC forever, going back to your playing days. Did you ever think you'd see a day where there was six new coaches, and what do you think that says about what's going on right now?

MIKE WHITE: I'm not sure I would have anticipated that much turnover. What does it say? I really -- we've got our hands so full with how we're going to defend and how

we're going to score and the rebuilding of a program, I guess you kind of put me on the spot here because I hadn't put any thought to it.

I guess it says that you've got some great opportunities in this league, and you've got guys that are dying to jump toward this league.

In terms of why certain coaches left certain programs, you'd have to take them one at a time. Off the top of my head, I can't even tell you which guys right now left our league last year.

I would say it's probably pretty prevalent, again, throughout high major basketball.

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