

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Wednesday, October 19, 2022

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Chris Jans

Men's Media Day Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to transition into Coach Jans at Mississippi State.

Q. You are one of six new coaches in the SEC. Or at least five newcomers, and Mike White moved around. What's your take on that? What do you think about the high turnover? Obviously, there's not necessarily a lot of patience in this league these days. What do you think about all of that?

CHRIS JANS: The fact that I'm one of the new coaches, I think it's just purely a coincidence and timing, who could have predicted something like that would happen when you go into a league that you are going to be one of, like you said, five or six depending on how you count it, new coaches in the SEC.

I didn't necessarily have an ambition to just be in the SEC, but I definitely had a goal of coaching at the Power Five level, the opportunity to recruit and coach against the best student-athletes and some of the best coaches.

Q. Like Bob said, covered the Arkansas and Mexico State game. What are the challenges that facing one of his team presents?

CHRIS JANS: You bring up a bad memory, that's for sure. Yeah, it was a heck of a college basketball game. If you like low-scoring games, you really enjoyed it.

But it was a rock fight. You know, you know going in it was going to be a tough challenge for us. They just had so much length and athleticism, and obviously, very well-coached and knew who they were.

It's one of those things that, to be honest with you, I still haven't watched the game. I will at some point. Hopefully before the season starts. Those days are ticking. I've been saying that for a while.



You know, we had our chances, we had our opportunities, but they kept fending us off, if you will. Then in the end made a bunch of free-throws down the stretch. I think they missed one all game long and did an excellent job of figuring out a way to win.

Then, obviously, they kept the momentum going for a few rounds in the rest of the tournament.

Q. Last year Tolu Smith had some injury issues, but whenever he was healthy, he was a pretty good player. What do you think is his ceiling and just what have you seen from him since you got the job there and what he can do in this league, if he can stay healthy?

CHRIS JANS: It's been fun to coach him. Like any new coach, when you get a job like that, you get your laptop fired up and try to get an idea of what you are inheriting and certainly evaluating at the same time for if they fit what you are trying to do and then what do you need to add to the mix to get that roster ready for the season.

Like you said, he has been injury-prone prior. Knock on wood, he has been healthy for the most part since I've arrived. He is still a little banged up, going through some rehab back in June when we started workouts, but since then, he hasn't missed a day. He does a really good job of following up with his rehab and being diligent about it.

But, you know, on the floor his ceiling at least for this year to me is to be a First Team All-League player. Obviously, I haven't coached in the league. I've coached against some of these guys and some of these programs in the past.

But he has that kind of ability to be a surprise, to be a First Team All-SEC performer. To be honest, if we're going to have the type of year that we want to have, he is going to have to play at that level.

And he is capable of it. And the way we like to play, with a little bit of an inside-out mindset, you know, I think he has been smiling ear to ear since we've talked about that and certainly since we've implemented how we're trying to play with this particular team.

So love coaching him. Great young man. He has been



really good in terms of handling some leadership ability along with playing on the court.

Q. Coach, you already mentioned getting a tournament team right off the bat in A&M Corpus Christi. What do you think of the nonconference schedule that you guys have put together for this year?

CHRIS JANS: I think most of us will tell you it's daunting. Everybody that stares at who they're about to play, and as you get closer and closer, it's, like, we've got a lot of tough games.

Starting off the season with a team well-coached with Steve Lutz and a team that's coming off an in-state tournament appearance, and we have the majority, if not all, their starters back and a bunch of guys that impacted winning for them.

It's probably not the smartest opener you're going to have, but that's just the way the cookies broke, I guess.

And then we've got a bunch of other games that are going to be really hard. You know, we have to play Akron in a neutral floor. We have to play Drake, who is picked to win the Valley on a neutral court.

Then certainly we go to Fort Myers and have Marquette with Georgia Tech and Utah in there as well. We drew TCU in the Big 12 challenge.

We've got a tough enough slate in our first year, but at the end of the day it could be a really good thing. You've got to give yourself opportunities to have a chance to build some résumé wins going into the SEC.

Obviously, in the SEC it's each and every night with opportunities, but I feel good about the quality of our schedule and the opportunities that we're going to have.

Q. When I covered your team out in the NCAA tournament, I was impressed with how you used your bench and played up-tempo. Is that going to be a style you're going to try to continue to do?

CHRIS JANS: We're definitely going to use our bench. I'm a big believer in playing a lot of guys for a number of different reasons. From where I sit right now, depth in the end could be a positive for us.

There's a lot of different ways to look at it. I'm comfortable in that space. I think it's great for team chemistry, for camaraderie. It's nice when you have a foul issue or an ankle that you are prepared to play other guys that aren't

just sitting over on the bench most games.

So in my opinion there's just a lot of positives to it, and we tend to play a lot of guys. I've had seasons where we play 12, 13 guys on a regular basis. I don't see us playing quite that many this year, but 10 or 11 is not out of the equation.

In terms of tempo, ideally I think every coach in America is going to talk about playing fast. You see those Twitter videos that Jordan Sperber puts out about the press conferences and him mimicking the coaches by talking about the up tempo and the fast play.

It's a goal of ours too, but the one thing in my opinion that's one of the hardest things to get teams to do is to play at that pace. Certainly you can control some of it by pressing and employing different techniques throughout the game, but traditionally we've got up and down the court. We've shot a ton of threes. We didn't make a ton of threes, but we were always one of the leaders in the country at temp rate.

We'll see how it unfolds. Eventually that's the way we like to play, but if we have to adjust to tailor-make it to our own players this year we'll do that.

Q. Just wanted to know your opinion on a couple of big ideas that are out there, floated out there for college basketball. One, summer basketball and, two, expanding the tournament field.

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, summer basketball I think is a wonderful idea. It's something that Coach Cal brought up in the Destin meetings. I'm not saying he was the impetus, but I don't know anyone else that's ever brought it up.

It's gotten some traction. It's gotten some legs. I think other people are talking about it, and there's a vacuum out there that I think would just raise the level of awareness of college basketball.

And if us coaches are willing to make some sacrifices and think outside the box and let our guys play against SEC teams or whatever the format they end up doing, it could only enhance the game.

To be honest with you, in the last five, ten years when they've opened up the access that we have with our guys now compared to what it used to be with just lifting and running and playing pick-up and now we get coach-and-teach, it gets old for them. They need a little break-up. They need something to look forward to.

So I think if we were able to figure all that out -- and I'm definitely not one of the guys that's smart enough to do that

-- and we had some sort of format that allowed our guys to play some games in the middle or late summer, I think it would really help the whole experience, and I think the fans would like it too.

In terms -- what was the other question? I'm sorry. I haven't thought a lot about it. I have to be careful with that from where I've come from and how important when you are at that level and those major leagues going into those March tournaments, you can have a great year and have one slip-up, one bad 40-minute game and be left out. I can understand the argument for.

But at the same time, I mean, it's the best three weeks of the year each and every year and the storylines, and there's plenty of David and Goliath stories and all those type of things every single year.

If you had to put a gun to my head, I would say I would probably keep the format, but I understand why there's some traction to expand it as well.

Q. This year's team, it's a lot of new faces, but it's also a lot of guys that have a lot of experience in college basketball. I guess, how have you seen that group kind of mesh together, and who has kind of emerged as a leader on your team?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, we're in the middle of it right now. You know, we end up when the dust settled, had five guys that had played for the previous staff. Then we've added eight to the mix and actually had three walk-ons that I inherited that we kept all of those. That's kind of the makeup of our team.

In this day and age with the portal, and certainly when you get a new job and they make a change in leadership, that's just how it is. Each and every year, each and every program is going to have to piecemeal it together, at least in that first year.

I do like the fact that the majority of our guys are older. Like you mentioned, experienced. Most of them haven't played in the SEC, obviously, but they've played college basketball at different levels.

One of my favorite things to say to anyone is that you can't teach experience. We're going to have some of that up and down the roster.

I think it will be beneficial when the games come around the corner.

Q. I know you are probably more studying your own roster trying to get to know everybody, but you played

Arkansas last year. They lose every starter from an Elite Eight team, and they have 11 newcomers, and they're ranked be No. 10 preseason. Have to see how the season plays out. What do you think that says about Eric and just his ability to quickly reload a roster, whether it's six freshmen transfers, all that stuff?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, I mean, he has taken that program and made it his own and done it his way. He did it at Nevada. Had a lot of success with recruiting and transfers specifically.

He has taken that blueprint over to Arkansas, and he has been one of the better college basketball teams since they've been here each and every year. I think it speaks volumes to him and his staff to their ability to track players that want to play for him and their style and that university.

So he has obviously got that program in great shape.

Q. Dashawn Davis earned rave reviews this summer from players. What have you seen from him since he came over?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, he has a chance to be an impactful player for us, and he needs to be an impactful player for us.

We knew him when he was in junior college, and then he played at Oregon State and had some success individually over there. You know, right now he is battling to be our starting point guard, and he certainly is going to play a ton of minutes regardless if he starts or not.

But he needs to be kind of our head of the snake, if you will. He has a lot of tools. He is big, strong for his position. He has a competitive edge to him. He can defend the ball. He can get the ball out in transition and push it and not only make others better. He averages 5.5 assists and led the Pac-12 in assists last year. He can score for himself as well.

The knock on him was he shot a low percentage from three last year, 18% over the course of the season. Certainly that's not up to snuff for a guard at any level, but, you know, structurally it looks good, and he shot much better than that in junior college. We roll the dice with him a little bit that way. He has been shooting it fine for us in practice, so he is a big key. He is pivotal for us in our success this year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

