

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Kermit Davis

Men's Media Day Press Conference

KERMIT DAVIS: Thanks, guys. It's good to get college basketball started. Just kind of a brief update on our team. Like a lot of teams in the SEC, there's a lot of change. We have six guys returning, four guys, high school players. It was a class that was ranked 12th in the country, four grad transfers that we're excited about that kind of together with 4,000 points and about 3,500 rebounds, 500 blocks, so give us good physicality.

We've got Daeshun Ruffin back from injury, competed in his first kind of blue-white scrimmage game yesterday. Obviously got hurt with an ACL against LSU last year. Robert Allen, the starter, is back. Tye Fagan is back.

We feel really good. Matt Murrell, who I know there's a lot of really, really good players in the SEC and on the All-Preseason team, I think Matt Murrell is one of the very best guards in college basketball. So excited about having Matt back.

Great non-conference schedule and looking forward to getting started against Alcorn State on November 7.

Q. (No microphone.)

KERMIT DAVIS: Yeah, he went through his first -- he got cleared for contact in the half court two weeks ago. About four days ago got cleared for contact in the full court. He had about 12 or 14 in about 16 minutes, as quick as about eight months, eight and a half months. He's worked diligently. He's got a lot of pop back.

I'm not saying he's 100 percent, but I think his knee is better than it's ever been. He looks healthy, looks great out there, and it's great to have him back.

I said it last year, he had been SEC Freshman of the Week, he had 20 at LSU, we won, tore his ACL, and he will be one of the very best point guards in our league.



Q. I know it's probably hard to judge this early in the season, preseason, but do you feel like the expectation is the NCAA Tournament for this team?

KERMIT DAVIS: No question. No question about it. I mean, we've been to two post-seasons in four years, and the COVID year I think we're the last team out. There's a lot of winning going on at Ole Miss, and we hope to keep the Rebels hot, and with football and baseball doing what they've done.

I like our team. It's the best depth that we've had since I've been the coach at Ole Miss. We've got a good blend of a lot of different faces.

No question, yeah, there's a lot of coaches in this league that think they're NCAA Tournament teams, too, but I think we've kind of set ourselves up obviously with a good non-conference schedule, so we feel good about it.

Q. You have the honor of being the 14th and final person I'll ask this same question to today. A couple big ideas have been floated for college basketball, summer basketball and one for the expansion of the NCAA field. I wanted to get your thoughts.

KERMIT DAVIS: Yeah, I've always been a proponent of the expansion, especially those 16 years when I was at Middle Tennessee and we were kind of bubble sometimes. We got upset in conference tournaments. I'd love to see the field go to 96, an opportunity for a lot of the other student-athletes around college basketball.

Obviously money maker, people watch it, an extra weekend of NCAA Tournament would be great.

Then the second part was summer basketball. Cal has been talking about it. The first time he said it way back, maybe six, seven years ago, it just made total sense, especially with the SEC Network. I'm sure he elaborates better than I can do it.

But we went on a foreign trip this summer to the Bahamas, and to be able to do something like that every year, and I think obviously with the SEC Network, the downtime in August or late July with not a lot of stuff going on, NIL



opportunities for our players, fan viewerships, I think it's an unbelievable idea, to do it on a weekend, no class time missed. Yeah, I'm a big proponent of that.

Q. What are three metrics that must be better for you this year with your team?

KERMIT DAVIS: Well, I thought we didn't guard very well at all. We didn't protect the rim, number one. I think now with the analytics of threes and A rim shots at the rim that shot blocking and rim protection is probably the most premium it's ever been in college basketball.

Our pace, and you hear that, but our pace has to pick up. We did play against inferior probably talent in the Bahamas, but I could see our pace is much better, so more possessions for our team.

And then just to be a lot better rebounding team. Two years ago we led the SEC in offensive rebound percentage and defensive rebound percentage in the same year, which hadn't been done in this league in a long time. So probably those three things.

Q. This may be a shot in the dark, but I'm curious if you remember playing Trevor Brazile at Missouri last year and what you think his potential might be with Eric now.

KERMIT DAVIS: Yeah, and I talked to Cuonzo about Brazile when he was there, and I thought maybe he had the best upside of any freshman in our league last year. 6'8", he played really good against us and made threes, as athletic as anybody.

I think he'll probably be one of the guys I'd bet in college basketball that will be a guy that's maybe ranked here and will go up. I don't think he made any Preseason All-SEC teams. I'd be shocked if he doesn't make a postseason one.

Q. Eric takes Arkansas to the Elite Eight again last year, and they lose every starter, and he's projected even higher, ranked top 10, picked right behind Kentucky in the league. Three McDonald's All-Americans. What do you think about the job he's done and what kind of program he's building it back to?

KERMIT DAVIS: Yeah, you know, I was with John Brady at LSU when Nolan had a lot of great, great teams. Arkansas fan base is tremendous. Eric has galvanized that again. The recruiting he's done has been spectacular.

Good coach, and like I said, it's kind of life of our business

now, being able to replace a bunch of guys. We have eight new players. They have a bunch of new guys.

I think last year we finished 12th in the country in recruiting and finished maybe fourth in the SEC. So it's almost like the old football recruiting now, and he's done a good job of getting good players there.

Q. What did you get out of the Bahamas trip most that you liked about your team? I know you said the competition may not have been the greatest, but it always helps a team grow. What did you see growth-wise out of your squad?

KERMIT DAVIS: Yeah, Daeshun Ruffin didn't play. He was still injured, Robert Allen. We had about four guys out with injuries.

Our freshmen really got a chance. Amaree Abram is going to be a really good player in our league. TJ Caldwell, another freshman from Fort Worth, very good. Malique Ewin, 6'10" player from Atlanta. Those guys got great experience.

And then we had a guy, James White. James White averaged around three a game last year, averaged 23.7 on the Bahamas trip. So it was a great surprise, and it really kind of jump started him, 6'5", 6'6", scoring guard.

So it was, and our grad transfers -- it was good. And then obviously the experience of being at the Atlantis and all the things with your team-building, but on the floor we're a lot further along right now than we would be because of the trip.

Q. What was it like at SEC, the spring meetings? There's six new coaches. Mike White obviously has been in the league, but six new spots. That kind of sounds more like stuff that happens in football, but basketball is getting pretty -- a lot of pressure on you guys, as well. What do you feel about that trend, and what do you think about the new crop of coaches coming in?

KERMIT DAVIS: You know, we lost outstanding coaches, and we gained really, really good outstanding coaches. I mean, the guys who are in the league all did an unbelievable job. Like I said, the new coaches that came in, some I know better than others. Obviously Mike has gone to Georgia. They've recruited well. Seems like they've got a good system of play.

You're right, pressure is a privilege really. It is. Probably with the pressure of the league and basketball, as always, usually it's tremendous opportunities right in the near

future, which it is, but it's just the nature of our business right now at every sport in the SEC.

A lot of people care about basketball in the SEC, which maybe wasn't the case 25 and 30 years ago, and I think that's a great thing.

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