

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

## Georgia Bulldogs

### Mike White

#### Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with Georgia.

MIKE WHITE: Good to be here. Beautiful day in Birmingham. Hope everybody's doing well. That's all I got. Go Dawgs. What do you have for me?

**Q. You've been in this league a long time, player, assistant, head coach, about your whole life. The league has always been good.**

MIKE WHITE: Right.

**Q. Five teams ranked, some getting votes. How have you seen the league evolve going back to your playing days?**

MIKE WHITE: A really good roster of coaches and staffs. The uptick in talent level, recruiting over the past decade. It's at an all-time high.

We're saying the same thing every year, right? Last few years, we've all gotten similar questions, and we say the league is better than it's ever been. You continue to say it. I think this will be the best year in the history of the league. And we might be saying the same thing next year. Probably will be.

A couple good examples. We're at Louisiana Tech, right, we played at Georgia in the NIT, Georgia finished that year near the top of the league. We're picked -- Georgia this year is picked 12th, if I'm not mistaken, off the top of my head. In the pre-season computer rankings, KenPom has us 57. Incredible. Speaks to the strength of the league.

12th-place predicted team probably 10 years ago would have been at or near 200. The depth of this league is incredible right now.

**Q. You look at the roster, the transfers you guys**

**brought in, a lot of them in the past season faced an SEC opponent or two. How much can that help them?**

MIKE WHITE: A little bit. A little bit. It's such a long year, one or two SEC opponents in the past will be a lot different than 18.

When you look at our overall schedule, we'll be a lot different than the 24 high major games. We have six high major non-conference opponents before the SEC tournament. 24 out of 31. We have beefed up our schedule, our non-conference schedule. The conference schedule continues to get tougher. Our guys will have to adjust. Freshmen, transfers, even. Even our returners. Again, with the strength in schedule overall.

**Q. We've seen with the transfer portal a lot of mid-major stars making the jump to the high major level. What do you think the biggest factor in those players is when they're able to make that jump?**

MIKE WHITE: I think the first thing is earning minutes. What are you doing in your program to get yourself opportunities on the floor? I think it's a gradual process. Each guy has a different process, right? A lot of factors involved. One being their competition on the roster, style of play, how they fit, and their development, obviously on the court as much as anything.

Their daily practice habits. A lot of factors involved, of course. There have been a lot of mid-major guys that have made the jump to high major basketball, have been very impactful, especially in our league. I can speak to our league where there's been a few.

We've got a few on our roster that we're hopeful are really impactful for us this year.

**Q. What did you learn about your team's trip to Italy?**

MIKE WHITE: I think you answered it really with the why not Italy. As we talked about it as a staff, as an administration, everybody was excited. A lot of us hadn't had the opportunity to visit that country. It was an amazing experience for the entire program.



Hardly anyone on the trip had been to Italy, had a chance to sightsee, develop on the court, off the court. Strength in relationships, of course. Learn a lot. Spend time with one another. Then, of course, take advantage of the extra practice time we got heading into the trip.

It was an incredible trip for us.

**Q. Obviously it's a new sheriff in town at your alma mater in Chris Beard, and one of the more notable games on their schedule non-conference is a throwback game at Tad Smith Coliseum, a place where you spent your playing career. What is one of your favorite memories? I think you played for Rob Evans?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, for three years, then Rod Barnes for one year. Coach Barnes all four years, three as an assistant, one as a head coach. Two of the best coaches in the country. Two have had incredible careers. Both those guys have had a major impact on my life.

Coach Evans, to this day, have consistent contact. As much a mentor as anyone in my life outside of my parents. Rob Evans and Rod Barnes gave me an opportunity to come back and work for him at my alma mater after four years at Jacksonville State.

Those two guys, incredible human beings, great coaches. A lot of great memories for myself and our teammates and our fan base, Tad Smith Coliseum was rocking at one point. We had a lot of success there from '95 to '99. Played with some really good players who I threw the ball to and ran to the corner before I turned it over and fouled a lot, of course.

We played a physical brand. We had the place packed. Student body was engaged. It was a really, really fun time for Ole Miss basketball.

It's really cool I think that Keith Carter and Chris Beard are bringing Coach Evans back. Hopefully a lot of former players and assistant coaches have the opportunity to be there, too, for that game.

**Q. As you go into your second season as Georgia, what do you feel like the biggest difference for you and your staff is in terms of comfort level with this program?**

MIKE WHITE: I feel like we'll be better, simply put. I think we're bigger, more athletic, deeper, a better passing team, a better ball-handling team. We're more familiar with our surroundings, with expectations, with all those things.

I mean, we're just further ahead this year than we were at this point last year. I think the Italy trip had something to do with that, of course. We're just excited for the opportunity to be even more competitive again in the SEC this year.

**Q. As far as Russel goes, what impact, tangible impact, are you seeing on the court right now getting ready for the season?**

MIKE WHITE: Size. 7', 280. Presence. He takes up space, right? He's a really good screener, really good offensive rebounder, working on the ball screen defense to become more effective there. At 280 really changes ends well, at least in spurts. We've got to be more consistent with that.

He's a guy that's going to impact our program greatly and immediately.

**Q. I don't know how well you got to know Eric Musselman. He was really one of the first guys that took advantage of the portal. Now everybody uses it. What do you think about Eric and the job he's done, maybe how he's taken advantage of the portal?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, sure. The perception there is that Coach Muss has done a really good job with transfers. I certainly would not disagree with that. He's done a lot of good things at Arkansas. Obviously he's had a heck of a run to this point.

I think that our whole league, our entire league at this point now, has taken advantage of the transfer portal, doing the best we can with finding the right guys that fit with what we're trying to do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

MIKE WHITE: Great. Thank you, guys.

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