

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Vanderbilt Commodores Jerry Stackhouse Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are ready for Coach Stackhouse. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. What does a successful year look like for you guys?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Try to win most all the games we can. I think that's the goal every year. We're excited about our group, as we are. Probably everybody that comes up is excited about their team at this time of the year.

We really are. We return in my mind one of the best backcourts in our league and possibly in the country. We've been able to add some pieces around them, so really excited.

The guys are working hard. Just counting down to opening night, November 7th. Seems like it was a ways away, now it's getting here pretty quickly. We're excited about the season upon us.

Q. Do you feel the two veterans in the backcourt, and also having Paul Lewis back, can help you hit the ground running a little bit earlier?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: All of our guys. I mean, our leadership. Ezra's leadership, not only on the basketball court but in the locker room. Tyrin, he's growing, being more of a vocal leader. He's a tremendous leader by example on the basketball court. Colin Smith, Paul Lewis. Those guys had some pretty successful freshmen campaigns. Now we're really looking to build on what they did last year. They've taken some big strides not only on the basketball court but in the weight room.

It's just been a big summer of work. Now it's time to put it all together and perform.

Q. Last year you faced VCU. Jalen DeLoach was on

that team. He's at Georgia now. Do you remember anything about Jalen's game, what you saw against him in that game?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Not really. Seems like I kind of remember the name. Wouldn't know him if he walked in here right now. No, some good players on that VCU team. Good players across our league. Now with the portal being as it is, it's hard to really see who's going to be what. It's amazing that anybody can put together really a prediction of what anything will be.

Teams change so drastically now from top to bottom. We feel like we have to focus on day to day, on ourselves, not really worry about what's going on with other teams. I don't spend a lot of time. I spend most of our time focusing on us, trying to see how we're going to get better.

Q. What do you make of the leaps that Colin Smith and Paul Lewis have made from year to year? Do you have an update on Lee Dort's health?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Like I said before, I mean, those guys have taken some big strides. Especially I think Paul, just his overall leadership on the court. He kind of deferred to Ezra last year, with him being older, it being his first year.

But they're competing every day at a really, really high level. It's fun to watch. They're pushing each other. Colin, the same. He's really versatile, a guy that can play the three for us, the four for us. Even in a tournament last year, we played him as some five.

He's a competitor. He's tough. Again, those guys are just having a year under their belt really understanding what this league is about, what it takes to be successful. I'm really, really, really excited about this campaign.

Lee Dort, he's on the mend. He's coming a long way. His body looks great for somebody who missed as much time as he has this off-season. He's doing a great job of doing everything he can to keep his weight down. I think he's probably maybe three or four weeks away. We're hoping that he's ready to go by opening day. We're not going to



force it. I think it's more important for us to be smart, not have any setbacks.

Really if we could have him at full throttle by SEC play, I think that would be more of a realistic goal. If he's ahead of schedule, able to participate in some of the early season games, non-conference games, then so be it.

I think we have the depth and the ability to play some versatile styles that we can do without him for right now. But he's definitely a big body that we need just from a rim protection standpoint, just his overall presence. He's a good player, and I know he's anxious to show that.

Q. What have you made of your freshmen class thus far, particularly Jason Rivera-Torres, and which of those guys will play early?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: All of those guys have had some really good days. Jason has been good. He's a really good player. He can really shoot the basketball. But they all bring something to the table, from Isaiah West, just a strong guard, 205-pound freshman. You just don't see those guys every day coming into our league. Malik Presley, he's had as good of days as anybody, of any of the freshmen. Carter Lang has had some really good days at the five in Lee's absence.

Those guys, they got veteran guys in front of 'em. There's not a ton of pressure on them to come out, as it has been in years past, where we've been forced to play a freshman a lot. I don't think we're in that situation now.

We love some of our pickups from our grad transfers. Evan Taylor is a really good player, a wing player for us, that has a lot of experience that we're excited about him.

Adding Ven-Allen Lubin as a transfer from Notre Dame, I think he could probably be our best post threat for us, as well as a guy that can face up and do some things, even stretch the floor.

Just a number of guys that have had some really good days in training camp and in the off-season. None of that really matters till you're on the court and those 40 minutes are for real. But they're competing really, really hard. I think they're ready to showcase that.

Q. How many of John Calipari's secrets has Brad been able to share with you? What kind of prompted that move?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Brad, he spilled the beans on everything. We got it all. We got all the scouts and everything right now. We're going to leave the Kentucky

scout completely to Brad (smiling).

He's been great. I reached out once we had those on-court positions and trainers. I reached out to a guy I really trust, Michael Lancaster up in Grand Rapids. Man, I'm looking to really get a skill guy. Do you have any names?

He was like, Man, I don't know what your relationship is with his dad, but Brad Calipari is a really good skill guy. He kind of came through our program and whatnot.

I'm like, All right.

So I brought him in, interviewed him. Just thought he was all about the right things. Obviously coach reached out object his behalf, a couple other people that I really trust. Dwane Casey reached out on his behalf.

But Brad is a guy on his own merit, he's really worked his butt off. He's doing a great job with our guys. We're excited to have him a part of our staff.

Q. It feels like you have a lot more athletic guys, with JQ, Malik Presley, even some of your older guys. Does this feel among your most athletic teams?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Yeah, I think not only athletic, but length. I think that we've always had big, heavy, three-point shooting team, like to take advantage of the three. We got guys that can do that. These guys still shoot it at a high level.

On the defensive end is where you really see us take another step. I mean, I think we've had to be perfect, be in the right spot as lot of times. What I'm seeing with these guys is they don't have to be in the right spot all the time and they can still recover and make plays because of their length and their athleticism.

JQ Roberts, another kid, we haven't even mentioned him as a freshman. He's been doing a really good job. 6'8", 6'9" kid that can go up two or three positions, from the three to the five. He was a track athlete. You know what I'm saying? A finalist in Indiana in the 200.

Just having those type of athletes can really cure some ills for us and cover up some mistakes that we might have that we maybe haven't been able to cover up in the past.

Q. Obviously you made some changes to the schedule with playing some bye games early. How do you weigh the margin of victory versus developing guys like you have in the past in non-conference play?

JERRY STACKHOUSE: Well, I mean, I think we have to -- again, we've been forced to do it a little bit. So much parity. There's parity now. Guys are coming in, competing. It's our older guys, it's their time. I think we're going to have guys in the rotation, maybe some guys that deserve to be in the rotation, that's not in the rotation right now.

I've never seen it happen during the course of a season where you didn't get an opportunity from an injury or guys maybe not playing well, that you're going to get a chance.

I think we're going to try to stick with it. I mean, I think it's sad that it's the case because of these metrics. If you're up with a 20-point lead, you can't put your guys in at the end of the bench, you have to try to maintain that 20-point lead. That's the reality of how it's weighed with the different rankings and things like that.

We're going to finish games. You know what I'm saying? I think we got punt returned by it a little bit last year. We thought we was going out and playing a really competitive schedule. I think we still got competitive teams, but it's teams we feel we can get away from. Do like everybody else. When in Rome, do what the Romans do. We try to beat the hell out of everybody in our early non-conference games, then if you falter a little bit during the SEC season, which we didn't, but it didn't pan out for us as well.

We kind of learned from that and we're going to try to adjust accordingly, try to go in and win the games, win 'em with the best that we can, then hopefully have as much success in the SEC, knowing that those games weigh quite a bit, as well.

Thank you.

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