

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Chris Jans

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for Coach Jans.

Q. I know you lost Smith for a while. Is there a timeline on that? How tough is that?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, I could have thought of some better things to happen to us a few weeks ago. It's a part of basketball. We're trying to deal with it as best we can.

Certainly he's the heart and soul of our team. We were excited that he made the decision to come back and finish his career as a Bulldog. It meant the world to our staff and our fan base, certainly his teammates as well.

Now first and foremost we're just trying to be there for him. It's a lot to handle with the kind of expectations that were placed upon him, the type of season that he wanted to have.

At this point we're just being there for him and making sure he gets through it mentally and physically. He's had a great attitude. He's ready to attack his rehab. He's going to get back as soon as he can.

In terms of a timeline, what they've told me originally, and it hasn't changed, was mid January. Obviously as they give you updates and do scans, they can tell how it's healing, et cetera. Hopefully, keeping our fingers crossed, that would change going forward, but that's all I know for now.

Q. You mentioned how much the Portugal trip did for you guys. Building off that over the last month, how have you seen the guys get closer and show that on the court?

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, obviously lots of coaches have been a part of the foreign tour, the experience that allows your program. There's so many benefits from it. But certainly

one of them is the expectation that that particular team will become a closer-knit team.

We have a lot of experienced guys coming back. We signed seven new players. The feedback that I got, which was heartwarming for our new guys, is how welcoming the older vets were. They brought 'em in, welcomed 'em with open arms. Just hearing little bits and pieces about the interaction they had while they were over there I thought gave us a chance going forward to just be a tighter team and have different, deeper relationships than maybe you would have in a normal season.

If there's going to be some silver lining, the injuries that have happened to us, hopefully that will be one of them, is that they'll bond together and understand that everyone's got to pick it up a little bit here and there in order to keep the train moving.

Q. Last season defense was at the core of your identity. Again this year with just about everybody returning. What is it going to take to maintain that intensity on that half of the floor with Tolu out?

CHRIS JANS: In addition to Tolu, 6'9" KeShawn Murphy is injured as well. Another junior college transfer, Jaquon Scott, that's 6'8". We're not as big and physical and athletic as we were hoping to be if we were full strength. That's certainly going to hurt us in all areas.

The obvious is not having as much size on the floor which shrinks the court, erases some mistakes you may have on a particular possession out front.

Our staff and I are trying to tweak how we play on both ends of the floor, in addition to the defensive side of the ball. But I think in the end we'll still have that as part of our identity. We're hopeful that the guys that we've brought in, the new players that have joined us, will provide some shooting and some scoring that we were lacking last year, at the same time buying into what gets them on the floor and what keeps them on the floor.

Q. SEC has five teams ranked in the pre-season polls, most of any conference. What do you think of the



league going into your second year? What did you learn the first year? People think football first in the SEC, but it's a hot basketball league now, too.

CHRIS JANS: Yeah, it's awesome. I didn't know what to expect. I'd never been in a Power Five in 31 years of coaching college basketball. I didn't know. I didn't know what it was going to feel like. I had an idea, but until you go through something and gain that experience, you just don't know.

It just means so much to so many. Every given night you're playing against quality players. The staff that you're trying to compete against is of the highest quality that there is in college basketball. And the fan bases, it means a lot to the fan bases in this league.

It's just awesome to be a part of it knowing that every single night you go out, you're going to be playing against a really good program, and there's going to be a lot riding on it.

We were obviously happy we were able to make the NCAA tournament in our inaugural season, when most people obviously wouldn't have predicted us to do that. That was a big step in establishing ourselves. We were disappointed at not staying longer.

We're certainly not where we want to be. But with the recent additions, if we can hold this thing together until we get back healthy and win enough games until that point, I think I'm going to like our basketball team.

Q. Without knowing Tolu's timeline going forward, what is your confidence in Jimmy Bell taking that spot?

CHRIS JANS: Good question. Fortunately, Jimmy has been around the block a couple times. He's older. He's been there, done that. He started 34 games in the Big 12. He understands what high-level basketball feels like. He's a worker. He has a business approach every single day.

I haven't sat him down and told him, Hey, now you got to do this, that and the other. He just knows. He knows. I know. Certainly it ain't about Jimmy trying to replace Tolu. We have to put our team and our individual players in the best spot for them individually and figure out how we need to play.

But it's definitely made us adjust on the fly. The only silver lining right now is that we have time. If this was in November or December, it would be really hard to make those adjustments on the fly. But we've got enough time to figure out which lineups we can put together to put

ourselves in a good position.

But Jimmy Bell obviously is going to be relied on to burden some of the load until Tolu gets back.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

CHRIS JANS: Thank you. Appreciate you guys sticking around.

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