

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Yolett McPhee-McCuin

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening comment from Ole Miss.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Good afternoon. Just want to thank even for being here today. I think this event always brings that reality, that pinch of reality, for me that the season's near.

I think it's also a great opportunity for our student-athletes to get in front of the cameras, start to talk about what's to come, what's next. That's the one word for our team this season because we're focused on the future, where we're trying to go, while being present every day and committed to the process for it to hopefully give us a great outcome.

This year, this group has a healthy balance of maturity and youth. My team is comprised of 245 starts at the Power Five level, so that's where the maturity comes in. Then the youth, I have five freshmen, too, that were ranked in the top 100. With the maturity piece, a lot of them are returners. We only have three transfers that came in. I think we tried our best to address deficiencies that we had this past season.

As we focus on where we're trying to go, I'm incredibly excited about what's to come. Our non-conference schedule, I'm not sure who picked it because it's pretty competitive (smiling). Our opening night we have Oklahoma, we have Louisville in the Southeastern Conference, ACC Challenge. In The Bahamas we have the potential to play the likes of Arizona, Michigan, Middle Tennessee.

We're going to be primed and ready to go by the time we get to January. I think when you talk about what's next for our program, that's it.

We did get ranked. Obviously we're flattered by the compliment. Our team understands that that is only a

compliment, not an accomplishment. Our focus and our goal moving forward would be to put ourselves in the best position to make another magical run again this season.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You called this the season of separation. What does that mean?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, it's the season of separation because as far as I'm concerned, I'm talking about even internally. I have 15 really good players. I don't know that I'm going to successfully be able to play 15 night in and night out.

They're going to have to figure out ways to create separation amongst each other. Then the separation also comes where last two years we've been in the top four, but we've been fourth. When are we going to separate ourselves and start to move into that top three of the pack? How are we going to continue to raise the bar for ourselves and separate ourselves from what team 48 did? What's next for team 49?

When I talk about separation, I talk about it internally first, then externally as everyone gets to witness us continue to build this program.

Q. KK Deans, it seems like you have a special relationship with transfer point guards. What is your relationship like with KK? What does she add?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I mean, KK is a mini version of me (smiling). Myah was a little different. Myah was very feisty, knew the Southeastern Conference, understood what it took. Her leadership was just something that we needed at the time.

The addition of Kirsten, what that has done is given us an opportunity to say, Man, we really like what Myah did, but now we want a little bit more scoring, we want a little bit more competitiveness on the offensive end.

I mean, there's no secret, we struggled from the perimeter. Sometimes we lost a couple games single-digit points. We



would have needed that shot or that three-point shot, that 38% that she shoots here and there in that mindset. That's what she brings.

She's an ultimate competitor. This is her last lap. She understands the league by being at Florida last year. I'm excited about growing and developing that relationship with her, for sure.

Q. You mentioned this is a veteran team. This year you have a player like Madison. How are you expecting her to take her leadership to the next level? You talk about separating.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: That's a great question.

Madison, like you said, has been here. She's a vet. She's one of the oldest. Her and Snudda are the oldest on the team. It's funny, I laugh saying it because I remember when she was just a pup.

This is a part of the plan. She's in the fourth season. We expect Madison to teach the others the Ole Miss way. That's a challenge. That's going to be a little uncomfortable for her at times.

We have also groomed her for this moment. For the last three years, she was a part of the leadership council. Maybe not a captain, but she sat in on all the meetings, she had a chance to listen to the expectations, and she's lived it.

Maddie knows the Ole Miss way, and it's time for her to step into that role and to teach them others and to teach them quickly.

Q. When you get into conference play, talk about having to match game plans with elite coaches, Kim Mulkey, Kellie Harper, Kristy Curry, Dawn Staley, Joni Taylor...

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, I think all of our coaches are elite. That's for certain. I got a little confidence from taking down one giant with Tara VanDerveer. Next on my list are those others (laughter).

That's really just a joke. I mean, any team we play in the Southeastern Conference we want to compete. One thing about our league, the coaches are going to have their players prepared. There's a certain rhythm to our league. Our coaches understand that and know that.

Like you said, Joni has been in the league, had a lot of experience. Kristy Curry, who is a vet. Then you have the two national champs with Dawn Staley and Kim Mulkey.

You have to bring your A game. That is why I came to this conference.

When I think about it, there have only been three teams that we have yet to be able to defeat, and that's South Carolina, LSU and Tennessee. We got our work cut out. I'm excited about the challenge.

Q. You had a pretty special moment seeing Dawn Staley this week. Can you talk about what that moment meant to you, and what those two coaches have meant for you as far as role models, and paving the way?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Yeah, it was a great moment because we were in town watching our players. Jonquel Jones is one of my players that played with Liberty. Obviously A'ja Wilson and Alaina Coates with South Carolina. Also Delaney [phonetic], a young lady from Rutgers. We all happened to be there.

On my way out, Dawn was talking to Coach Stringer. I just walked up to them and I said, Oh, we got to take this picture because I want to put this up in my office. See, that's three generations of coaches right there. That's from the Baby Boomer, Gen X with Dawn, then me, the millennial.

I believe in the quote: you can't be what you can't see. Those young ladies, along with others, Pat Summitt, the like, have set the example.

Dawn and Coach Stringer was most relatable for me. I just had to take advantage of that moment. Really grateful for the doors they have opened for me and many others that look like me.

Q. After the Louisville loss, I believe you said something the lights were too bright. Now that your team has been in those situations, do they know the lights? What does that bring for a competitive regular season and post-season?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I just think you have to grow through things. We ran into a Louisville team that had been to the Elite Eight, Sweet 16 numerous times, and I think the Elite Eight a handful of times. That experience matters. That experience was great for my team two years ago when we lost to South Dakota that had three fifth-year seniors. We learned from that.

We came back, we went to the Sweet 16. If we're going to continue with this trend, then we should be a Final Four team (smiling).

But the experience is definitely something that you cannot rush. You have to kind of go through. I'm grateful to have Madison Scott, Snudda Collins, Tyia Singleton, Ayanna Thompson returning because they went through it, for sure.

Q. Can you talk about the other transfers.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I mean, we never try to replace players, but we knew that when Angel Baker graduated, Myah Taylor graduated, we would have to step it up and continue to move forward in that light, in that fashion.

We wanted to get someone from a leadership perspective at the point guard position that we thought was heady, an alpha female. We want that to just take us to the next level.

Kennedy Todd-Williams was someone that fell into our lap. When she went into the transfer portal, was interesting because her circle reached out to us first. I don't know that we would have even tried to recruit her because we did not have any connection with her.

The connection was they saw us versus Stanford. Toddy was looking for another opportunity. After talking with her and spending some time with her, we knew it was a match made in heaven. She is going to be able to impact us on both ends of the floor immediately. The same with KK Deans.

And then Kharyssa Richardson was intriguing for us because of her youth. She's played in the SEC, but she's still a sophomore. That's prime in the portal. Someone that knows the league but can grow with you for two to three years. That's what she brings.

She's going to be an impact player from us, as well. People don't talk about her a lot, but I know what she's going to be able to do. She has been a force to be reckoned with.

Q. You listed several teams that you're still seeking to beat. What would you say you've learned the most about yourself in this role?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Man, my character got tested in year two with the 0-16 season. My reason for doing what I do, I had to decide. Was it for the wins or was it for helping young people. It's okay to be for both because I'm a competitor at heart.

That allowed me to focus on building my zest, my character. It allowed me to go back to the drawing board time after time after time. If you looked at that year, we

would play one team, lose maybe by 20 or 30 points, then we would play them again and lose by 10.

I felt like year two was my best coaching year because I did not have the talent that I've had last year or the year before with Shakira Austin. I think what that has done, the Southeastern Conference, when you come in, it grows you up quickly (smiling). It's unforgiving. Those teams were incredibly unforgiving with me. I appreciate them for it.

You think about last year, the South Carolina game. One minute 24 and we're up two, then their experience kicked in. That game prepared us for Stanford.

What it has done, it has made me self-reflect and has also made me and my staff say, What are we going to need to go to the next level? I think with the five freshmen we've signed, I know you all don't know about 'em, but they're dynamic. I will put them up against any freshman class in the country. The transfers that we went out and were fortunate to bring in to our group and the returners puts us in a situation that allows us to be competitive and use all of the lessons that I've learned, my staff have learned, and all of our returners have learned.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Thank you.

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