

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

**Missouri Tigers**

**Robin Pingeton**

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR:

ROBIN PINGETON: First of all, I want to thank everyone for being here. I'm sure the last two days, it becomes quite a bit on your time. Thank you for coming out and supporting women's basketball.

I think it's a great time to be a women's basketball fan, a great time to be a women's basketball fan for sure. So many exciting things happening.

SEC Media Days, exciting, everyone is fresh, ready to attack the season, as am I. Really excited about our off-season. Just feel really blessed with who we've been able to add to our roster. We've got a lot of new faces. We've got several freshmen that are mature beyond their years. We've got some international players that have played at a really high level, have had some great experiences playing pro ball.

We've got a handful of grad transfers. Kind of an interesting mix. As a coach, you think you know what it's going to look like, but you never know for sure.

I've just felt so good about the connection, the connectivity, and how quickly and organically those relationships were formed. I always felt like that mortar is so important, that culture, that chemistry, how we interact with each other is so important. It's been really cool to see so many new faces and how they've been able to come together.

I would say probably the best off-season I remember having in a long time as a coach. Just a group of young ladies that are really hungry, have done so much more than what's been required of them. As you know, NCAA rules give us a certain amount of hours we can work with our players in the summer months and in the off-season. This is a group that really lived in the gym.

I think we've got more depth. We've got more height. We have good experience coming in with our grad transfers and again our freshmen that I think are mature beyond their years.

It's been a really good couple months with our team. I think what you'll find when you watch them is an uncommon connectivity in a group that's just relentless. They've worked really, really hard like I said earlier.

We're excited about the season. Couldn't be more proud of our seniors, obviously Hayley Frank back for a fifth year, still working on how to get her a sixth year, we'll see what happens with that. She's just been such a tremendous cornerstone for our program, a great ambassador, Second Team All-SEC last year. I feel like her off-season she's continued to elevate her game. Excited for her, what's in front of her as a player.

Proud of our leadership. I think this is a group that has set the standard very high for themselves. I just want to make sure that I'm doing my best to be able to challenge and support them. I love how they show up for each other. Our returning players have done a tremendous job of embodying that mindset.

I would say Ashton Judd, as well, I want to make sure I speak about her. On the All-Freshmen team last year. A young lady that maybe had the biggest growth in the off-season out of any player on our team. Just, again, really relentless in her pursuit, in her work ethic. Feel like she's taken her game to that next level, which is exciting. You never know for sure between that freshman and sophomore year, but she's really embraced it. We've seen a lot of growth in her.

Excited about our new coming kids. Again, got a group of freshmen that have done a tremendous job, some experience in our grad transfers, that maturity, then the international kids.

I think we're all excited for the start of season. I know the players are anxious to play somebody outside of themselves. We've had one exhibition so far, then we'll have one more. Before we know it, it will be November 6



and it's tip for real.

Excited about the upcoming season and would love to answer any questions that you might have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. What is the dynamic coaching three sisters?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Over the years we've had several sisters, the Cunninghams, the Porters, Maddie and Morgan Stock. We've never had three on one team in one locker room.

Actually it's been really fun. They all have their own personalities, skill sets. They've all always been high, energetic, just really good balance in personality to be around. We give them a hard time now and then when they have their sisterly moments. For the most part it's been pretty fun.

**Q. Grace Slaughter getting the No. 1 recruit out of Missouri, how did you bring her in?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, Grace Slaughter is just I think somebody that's going to be a really exciting player for us. She's had some USA Basketball experience. Has the ability to stretch the court, which is how we like to play. Really good off the bounce.

The unknown was how quickly she'd get adapted to the pace of the game, the physicality of the game. But she's a young lady that's going to have a really bright future ahead of her.

We were able to form a relationship at a young age, she would come to camps. We built that relationship. I think being so close to Columbia, they grew up Mizzou fans, go to football games, basketball games. They've been in Columbia a lot. There was a foundation there over the years with camp.

I really think based on who we are and our core values, the way we play, it's what she was looking for. She's a young lady that gave us a commitment at an early age. Somebody like that, who's had so many accolades, brings such a strong skill set, but even more importantly an incredible human being, just high character, great heart posture. It is a freshman, somebody that you can really continue to build your program around.

**Q. Throughout your tenure, homegrown talent has been important. What is your approach to recruiting in state versus out of state? What do you think the Missouri natives have brought to your program?**

ROBIN PINGETON: I was talking to somebody earlier about NIL. Sophie's name came up. You can imagine how frustrating that was for her. We talked about everyone has to blaze a new trail.

Homegrown kids are important to us. Even for a fan base, the opportunity to be able to support players that they've watched growing up through high school, watching AU games, players that played against each other or with each other, that creates just an opportunity to really get to know these players on a much deeper level than just on the court.

I think that's really helped us elevate our attendance and the excitement around our program.

Going into this year, half our team is from the state of Missouri. Not just from Columbia, but from the state. I always feel like if you can keep the best players home -- sometimes that's harder to do than what you think. They want to go away and experience college. I feel like if you can keep the best players home, build around that, you're putting yourself in a good position to have support for your program.

**Q. Athletic director made a comment about the expectation of this team going to March Madness this year. What is your response to that?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I don't look at it as any more pressure than I've had any other year. I've got very high expectations. To me, I've got to model the behavior that I want my players to have. We've always been being where your 10 toes are, embracing the day, winning the day, 0-0, trying to be the best version of yourself you can be.

That's really where my mindset is. I think people have asked, Do you feel pressure? To be honest with you, when I think of pressure, I think of what's going on in the Middle East right now. I think it really puts things in perspective.

I think for me to do what I love to do with who I love to do it with, the only pressure that I'm feeling is the pressure of making sure that I help my players be the best version of themselves that they can be on and off the court because when they signed up to come to Mizzou, they signed up for just that.

I think that would be the hardest thing to accept. At the end of the year, if we can't help them be the best version of themselves on and off the court, that's what my concern is. That's what I want to do and am committed to doing.

**Q. It's an important game against Arkansas, it's been tough sledding for y'all recently. What makes them a tough matchup for y'all?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Mike is actually a really good friend of mine. We've had some battles, for sure.

I think their style of play, which is something that we're trying to improve on, as well. We've talked a lot in the off-season about points per possession and how we improve in that area.

In particular with Arkansas, Mike has done a great job, recruited really well. Their ability to spread the court, but also play downhill and get to the free-throw line. He's an analytics guy, so he's got that piece of the game definitely figured out.

We've had some tough games. We've had some games where we won, some games that have come down to the wire. But obviously just how close we are in proximity has created a little bit of a rivalry that I think is really exciting for our fans and for our players.

I think every night playing them you've got to be ready to get up and down and tie your shoes up and play at a very fast pace. I think that's really allowed the success, is his ability to put multiple shooters on the court that have the ability to shoot the three or get to the rim or get to the free-throw line.

**Q. You mentioned Hayley Frank earlier going into her fifth-year. What are your expectations for her?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Great question.

For Hayley, I think she's really achieved a lot. I think she's had great success. When you look at where she came from, from Strafford, somebody that really wasn't on a lot of recruiting radars, a lot of that was because she didn't play AU basketball. A small-town kid that grew up through the ranks, has become one of the best shooters in the SEC.

Also, a lot of times you talk about outcome, points per game, field goal percentage. I look at it more as who she's become in the process. Just so proud of her leadership skills, the way she shows up consistently in that locker room for her teammates. I think it's something that's very admirable.

You talk about someone's heart posture, the way that they lean into their teammates and support them. It's never been about Hayley Frank in her eyes. It's always been about how can I help elevate my team.

She had a really great off-season. I think experience helps, right? Going through the fires and having an opportunity to be on that big stage under the bright lights, knowing your competition, being in different venues, I think her coming in as a fifth-year senior, she's done it, she's been there, she's hungry, but she also understands the importance of keeping first things first, really just focusing on winning one day at a time.

**Q. You mentioned Ashton Judd. What would you say is her biggest area of growth coming into year two?**

ROBIN PINGETON: That's a great question, too.

That young lady has a work ethic that I think can be matched by very few. She's just relentless in her pursuit of excellence. So for her in this off-season, I think just being able to play with pace. She's a kid that can obviously stretch the court. But learning how to play with more pace when she's playing downhill. More consistent from the three-point line. Being more I think effective with her back to the basket.

More than anything, I think the experience of being in the SEC, one year under her belt, again for most freshmen it's that transition of the physicality and the pace of the game, then being able to have the endurance throughout the course of a long season, a lot different than a high school season.

Just all those experiences, coupled with her ability and desire to get in the gym in that off-season, just work on every facet of her game, has been really, really admirable and impressive.

**Q. You brought in a couple of freshmen from the international ranks. What went into that approach for you?**

ROBIN PINGETON: Yeah, I think as a recruiter, you're always looking, your eyes are always open, you're always listening.

We were fortunate to find some information on a couple international players, which I really like the way they play. I think having the experience of playing on different pro teams internationally is something that a true freshman from the States probably doesn't have that same experience. Playing on that stage in some of those World Cup tournaments is huge.

But everything's got to align with what you're looking for in a recruit. Building those relationships, really it's a little bit harder because of time changes, their ability to get on campus multiple times. It makes it a little bit more

challenging. A lot of Zoom calls, phone calls, some FaceTime, really just peeling back the layers, trying to build relationships, see if it's a fit, if it makes sense.

We're really fortunate. Obviously Mama Dembele is going to be a fourth-year senior for us, but also with Hilke and Luci, again, two really, really incredible human beings that I think are high character, love the game, got a great work ethic, have the ability to stretch the court and play a style that I think really complements what we do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

ROBIN PINGETON: All right. I appreciate you guys. Thank you.

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