

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

## South Carolina Gamecocks

### Dawn Staley

#### Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with South Carolina and go straight to questions.

**Q. There's record number attendance in women's sports. There's WNBA expansion coming. We're seeing record numbers in TV viewing. You're opening the season in Paris. Is it safe to say women's basketball, WNBA or college, we are in the midst of kind of a golden era for it?**

DAWN STALEY: I just answered this question on the Sirius XM. I think it's bittersweet. I think we missed a big portion of it. I think now we're in a place where there's not enough network competition to display everything that our game is giving us.

I mean, the players are better. Coaching is better. There are more stories to be told. There's just not enough outlets for us to do that.

But we're in a place where we're busting at the seams. We need more places to televise our games. We need more places to story tell about our game. It's a good thing, but I just don't want us to miss out on any more opportunities for us to continue to expand.

**Q. A lot of people's roles are expanding or changing this year, particularly Bree Hall said she focused a lot on leadership. Is there anything that stood out to you about her development in that area or anything you do to help her be ready to take on her role this season?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it's learning for Bree. Bree, I mean, she's a junior now, so she should understand what it is to take on a leadership role because she had so many great leaders, her first two years in college.

Whether she's a leader or not, I want her to be able to be on every day in practice. If trying to be a leader takes

away from that, then I just want her to be on, to handle the heavy load of going like every rep instead of every third rep and being good at that and being consistent at playing both sides of the basketball.

But she's trying. She's really trying to be a little more vocal. She's trying to take on that heavy load. She's doing a great job of balancing it right now. We haven't played any games, and we know that mentally it's going to take a toll. What's going to happen if she has a bad game or two bad games, consecutive bad games?

That's where you'll see where she is in her progress. But we are aware. We are aware. We want her mind right. We want her body right. We want her in a good place where she can excel.

**Q. This is the first time in a couple years that y'all have not been No. 1 in the pre-season polls.**

DAWN STALEY: We're not (smiling)?

**Q. How does that change the mindset of the team? Where do you see the team? Do you feel they're still contenders or it's a rebuild?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I approach it the same way whether we're 1, 10, 12, not ranked. It's just a prediction. It really is a prediction by people who I hope they study the game.

I mean, it's not a rebuild. It's not a rebuild for us because we're very talented. Like, we got talent on our team. We just lack a little bit of game day experience. I mean, half of our roster have played some high-level basketball. We just have to up their experience. We have to create that, assimilate that in practices so when the games come, it's more natural for them.

We could not put them in a better situation because of the players that we had in place. We would have liked to experience some of them having a little bit more experience, being in a starting lineup, but they couldn't break into it.

I'm excited. Like, I'm excited for this team. We're in a position where we're in the hunted, we're hunting. That's not a bad place to be.

**Q. Who is having more fun in the off-season? How cool is it to still get these opportunities to experience the love of the game as a fan? On the growth of women's basketball, when you see what tangible things can happen first and foremost to add to the growth, you know better than anybody the slow process of growing something, what do you think can happen in these next few years for the game?**

DAWN STALEY: Well, we going to take the World Series on back to Philadelphia. That's one (laughter).

The first part was, I'm enjoying. Anytime you can break into a Major League Baseball Playoff game and they think to bring in a women's basketball coach, I think it's truly special. I think people are recognizing the power of our game and the people that are in our game. That's cool.

To be in the WNBA finals, I got a chance to go to Game 3 and Game 4 because I never got a chance to see any of our players play in the Finals. We had a break in the schedule for me to do that. Our people at South Carolina allowed me to get there and back, to come here today.

I think it's really important that we're present in our players' lives. They've given so much to our universities, our athletic departments, our programs. If they're in that position, and you don't get in that position very often, to be in the WNBA Finals, we should be present.

But to be there to see Alaina Coates get her WNBA championship, to see A'ja win a WNBA championship, it's surreal. That's what you want. It's your kids that are able to check off a goal in life, and you're there, you're seeing it happen in real-time.

That's a pretty cool experience.

Then tangible, something tangible that could happen within our game to help expand it? I don't know if this -- well, it is tangible. We need competition. We need network competition. I don't say this to shun ESPN, because ESPN has been our outlet. We have arrived on that network. But they need competition. They need competition or else they're going to give us what they think we should have, and that's it.

I do think we're worth a lot more than what's on the table right now. We're worth a lot more. But other networks are full. Like, we need big networks making room for women's basketball.

That would probably be the tangible thing that needs to happen in order for us to keep up with the growth of our game.

**Q. Since you took over at South Carolina, you have a record of 21-0 against the Crimson Tide. Zero of those games have been within single digits. You look at the turnaround at Alabama, what would you credit the relative success they have had? What do you think the next step for that program is to try to keep on a level of a school like South Carolina?**

DAWN STALEY: Kristy Curry. She's done an amazing job. She puts herself in the position to win basketball games. You say that, but they were hard-fought games, a possession or two in the fourth quarter.

We've won, but we didn't walk away saying -- we walked away saying, That was tough. Always. There, our place. It all comes down to recruiting. It all comes down to getting talented players.

I'm not saying she didn't have the talent. Even if she wasn't as talented as our team, she gave us a run always. Very hard scout. Always putting us back on our heels.

I think the style of play is great. It's just how we rose up is we just got better players, better players, better players. Once you get one or two, people are going to want to play with those one or two, and then you get better. You move up the rankings.

**Q. Bree earlier talked about Kamilla's development as a leader. What have you seen from her as the pre-season so far as a leader?**

DAWN STALEY: You hear Kamilla. Like you didn't hear her in the past two years that she's been with us. She's communicative, she's energetic. I think she's playing with a zest of wanting to dominate. That's what we want. We want you to understand that.

Domination is a process that everybody has to go through if that's what they want. You do have to want it. Like, we see her stature, we see her presence, her ability, but until she takes that step of wanting it, that's when it happens.

That's what she wants. She's very, very competitive. Didn't say a whole lot, but now she's saying a whole lot because there's a big void left with our graduation of last year's team. That's what you want to see. You don't want to force them to do it. She knows who's next up. Now she's embracing that role for us.

**Q. Talking to Te-Hina earlier, she talked about the way to get on the court was by playing defense. How have you seen her grow? What have you seen from her that surprised you?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, we call her Paopao, so Paopao -- I mean, I watched her during the recruiting process, although we didn't recruit her, I watched. I've seen her. We played against them in The Bahamas, I believe. I don't think she played in that game, though. Then we watched her when she went into the transfer portal. We watched her games, her clips. Without a doubt she can score the basketball.

My question mark was will she be a willing defender. That was my question mark when we decided to get in the race of recruiting her. We saw some of the things that she needed for where she's trying to go.

I sat in front of 16,000 people watching the Aces and the Liberty. That game came down to defense, came down to defense. You're going to have to play it at our level. If you're going to go to the next level, you're going to have to have a high-level commitment to it.

She's committed to it. I mean, she's come a long way. When she sticks her nose in there, she takes charges. She's playing angles a lot better. I mean, she's a willing participant in giving it up on the defensive side of the ball.

I mean, nothing really surprises me. What we recruited her for and to be, she's been that. She's got a great voice, a great command of our basketball team. I mean, she and Raven play off each other extremely well.

I think they work well together. They can work well independent of each other. Both of them will be lead guards for us. I mean, I don't think I've ever had two, like, lead guards of this caliber on our basketball team in all of my years of coaching.

**Q. You have some impressive freshmen coming in. Can you speak to who have stood out to you? There's also some homegrown talent.**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, they all look like freshmen. Some of 'em look great at times, then other times they look like a penny with a hole in it. But that's their process.

I will start with MiLaysia Fulwiley. I think she's a generational talent, I do. Generational to me is being able to do things that no other people can do. Like, she does things that I haven't seen a woman's basketball player do. The moves she makes, the shiftiness, ability to shoot the long ball, get to the basket at will.

But I also have -- she's very coachable. She wants to be great. We have to teach her greatness is a process, working on it daily. She really understands that. She's taken a liking to that.

Tessa Johnson, she can flat-out shoot the basketball. She can flat-out shoot. The rest of her is trying to rid herself of her high school ways 'cause the pace is quicker. Her passes are slower. They're high school mode. We always say high school dropout, high school dropout. We want you to drop those high school habits. But that's a process for her.

I do think Tessa needs to be a little bit more selfish in scoring the basketball because she can do that. Some of her best defense is going to be her ability to put the ball in the hole.

Who else do we have? Sahnnya Jah. Athletically gifted. Elite athlete. Unafraid to mix it up. Great offensive rebounder. Great defender. Willing to mix it up. So she's going to make me play her. Like, she's going to make me play her by how she approaches practice every day.

And then Sakima is 6'6", utilizes her height in a great way. Really has a great understanding of how we want to play. Like, if we give an instruction of how we want to play, plays it to a T. That's what you want. Very, very coachable. Great understanding of the game. Should help us.

We only have 11 players, so everybody's going to get an opportunity to play.

THE MODERATOR: We're out of time. Thank you, Coach.

DAWN STALEY: Thank you so much.

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