

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Lamont Paris

Men's Media Day Press Conference



LAMONT PARIS: Glad to be back here. One of the most nervous moments of my career probably was speaking at a graduation, commencement speech. You speak on a lot of things, but that's the one that you feel like if you mess it up, someone's life is going to be ruined. But I made it through that.

Glad to be back here. The weather is cooling down, and that always means the start of basketball season. Really excited to be back, to be back amongst great coaches, some unbelievable teams, and really excited for this group to continue to gel and get ready to see where they lead us. It's a great opportunity.

It's really fun for me. I enjoy doing this. Probably now more than ever, you've got more turnovers and new faces on your roster. And so, again, just trying to see where these guys take us is an exciting adventure for me personally, and I'm really looking forward to getting going.

But we had a really good summer, a lot of new faces. At the same time, some familiar faces. That's always good. A good amount of experience, not only at the Division I level but a good amount of experience within our program, which I also think is important.

That's the basic stuff. I'll open it up for questions.

Q. What is the role for Nick Pringle transferring over from Alabama?

LAMONT PARIS: It'll be a very significant role for Nick. He's an experienced guy. He's from the state of South Carolina, so we were thrilled to have him come back. He's been experienced not only in college basketball but he's well-versed in SEC basketball.

He's got not only NCAA Tournament experience but he's played in the Final Four, and all those things will serve him

well. But his role will be one of leadership. We'll have really high expectations for what his role will be as a basketball player.

The one good thing I think about there are a lot of moving pieces and guys transferring from one school to the next, I think one way to look at it is that you can provide opportunities for guys, different roles, different opportunities. Nick will have a role for us that he probably has never had in his college career, and so that's exciting to help provide that for him. I'm really looking forward to seeing how he adjusts to that role.

My anticipation is that he'll do a tremendous job with that.

But we're going to count on Nick for a lot of things on both sides of the ball. Defensively he's a high-energy guy. He's a tremendous athlete. I don't think he's ever been asked to score, but we're interested in exploring that and seeing what that looks like for him. But he's got a great infectious personality, a lot of energy, and really looking forward to seeing what he does this year.

Q. What is it that makes Collin such a special player, and where do you see he can make some realistic jumps here in year two for you guys?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, Collin does a lot of good things. I think the strengths that really tend to set him apart, he's got a tremendous feel for the game of basketball. He's incredibly unselfish, probably too unselfish, but he's incredibly unselfish. He values playing defense at a high level. He takes a lot of pride in doing that.

But I think the things that really make him different are he's got an incredible feel, incredible touch, and just a knack for putting the ball in the basket, even in some non-conventional ways. You can get him in a short role situation and he can make a play or attack the rim or pass. He's a really good passer.

I think those are the things we saw in him when we recruited him that led us to believe that he had a chance to be a really good player.



In terms of growth, I think there are a couple of different areas. I think he has such good natural touch. At one point I do believe he'll be able to shoot the ball with range. Only time will tell when that happens. I think that's an area that he can grow.

Then I think the other one is just playing a different role. He's the type of guy that can get double figures in any particular game, but we're going to need him to generate offense for us.

And I think there's a distinction that's made there that's significant because it's one thing just to go out there and in 30 minutes find your way into 14, 15, 16 points, and then there's another thing completely to say the offense -- you're generating offense, not only for yourself but for others and making decisions, and you're the focal point of other teams. I think that's another area of growth for him, just to be able to not just get stuff to happen for him but to intentionally create things for other guys on his team.

Q. Last year you stood here, your team was picked last in the league, but you knew or you thought you knew what you had. Fast-forward to this point this year, does anything that's happened in the last year kind of validate what you feel like you are as a head coach and how things played out for y'all last year?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah. I wondered how many questions it was going to take before somebody referenced last year. While I thought about channeling my inner JJ Redick in his opening press conference, I decided not to do that.

But you know how I feel about rankings, and honestly, I think it's a favor to be put in a position where you have to prove yourself. I think we all have to prove ourselves. When you get a ranking that's not as high as what guys think, it sets the stage for constant validation and approval amongst your peers, amongst the media, amongst the selection committee.

I think for them, there's nothing that could be better than for us to be ranked in a way that they perceive as disrespectful.

But you know, we have to prove ourselves. So why should we be ranked any different? The rankings are -- I didn't do as much research, I don't have the same stats that I did last year, but fortunately I think it's generally accepted if the last-place team finishes first that you don't get to pick any more. Luckily we didn't finish first, for those guys.

But as far as my own validation, I've been doing this for a long time. Maybe particularly down here in the Southeast, my name is not sexy. But I went to the College of Wooster.

People don't know how to pronounce the name of the university. I am who I am. I'm very comfortable with who I am. That kind of was our mantra last year. There was a couple of things, one was earn it. They made that up themselves in preseason that they wanted to earn it. I feel like they did.

But the other thing that they always said, I didn't tell them, was we are who we are, we do what we do. That's not going to change. I am who I am. I like the guys that I like, and we develop guys the way that we do.

Hopefully we rely on the fact that -- there's probably a couple teams that wish we didn't have to play the games based on where they're picked. We rely on the fact that we get to play the games to show that maybe the picks just aren't that accurate. But we're looking forward to getting a chance to try to prove that.

Q. Defense was so much a part of this team last year and kind of the buy-in you got from everybody. You lost a lot of players off last year. Do you feel like this year's group has the same kind of buy-in to those principles and rules from what you've seen so far?

LAMONT PARIS: So far. We ended up being a really good and efficient and effective defensive team last year. It's hard to predict.

I think from a physical standpoint potentially there's more. We have more length. We have more athleticism overall. But how that comes together in terms of learning and committing to rules, a complete devotion to basic principles defensively, we'll have to see as the season goes.

The potential for us to be really good defensively is there again, but we're not there.

We start, honestly, the first thing I would just look at would be how the summer went and how our guys interacted with one another, and I think that's probably where the biggest similarity is between this year's team and last year's team are is that we just have a group of guys that respect one another at the highest level. They enjoy being around one another.

We have workouts and 30 minutes after the workout is done in the summer they were sitting around and talking about what was going on in the Olympics or whatever it is. We don't tell them to do that, they just do that. They like one another.

I think that always helps in your plight to be a good team. And defensively you have to make some sacrifices, and this is the type of group, the makeup of it, anyway, that

would lend itself to believe we have a chance to do some good things defensively.

Q. The SEC is very talented and tough, and their expectations are the makeup of the SEC is going to be a challenging conference. How do you see this team for you guys kind of fitting into the toughness of the SEC?

LAMONT PARIS: Well, as Commissioner Sankey mentioned, this league continues to get better every year. I think back to Rick Barnes made a statement that last year's season was the best he had ever seen in the SEC, and he can't imagine it being any better.

Fast-forward a year later, it might be better. It's full of tough-minded and tough -- physically tough teams but tough-minded teams, which I think is just as important or more important. That's kind of who we've been. That's who I am.

There are challenges. We want to be in front of challenges and then overcome obstacles and hurdles and make achievements in the face of challenges. I don't think we want to -- I don't think there's near the gratification of making achievements without adversity, without challenge. That's what we want. I think everybody wants that.

Certainly that will be provided in this conference with the great coaches, the great traditions and the number of good players that are in this league.

But our toughness -- we had a high level of toughness last year. Again, it's a process to try to get to that, but we have the makings of what could be another good, tough team. If you're not tough in this conference, it's going to be hard to win any games, to be honest with you.

Q. The definition of off-season probably has changed over the years, but it is a time where players can improve. How do you as a coach utilize the off-season to improve as a coach?

LAMONT PARIS: That's a good question. Times have changed. The amount of time that you have as a coach to do anything that's not directly related to the team that you have right now is getting smaller and smaller, and that's whether it's spending time with your family, playing a little golf, talking to other coaches.

That's one thing I think that unfortunately doesn't happen as much. You used to be able to spend more time and go see coaches and sit down and talk more about basketball, and it's getting more and more difficult to do that.

But I did try to make a commitment to do that this summer and in the off-season, just talking with as many coaches as I can. We did some things that worked last year that we had success with, but still, bouncing that off of other coaches, some things, and trying to learn.

I just got back from Bo Ryan, who I worked for for -- I was seven years in Madison. The majority of that time was with him. He was inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame, so I just got back. But while I was there I went to the Boston Celtics and watched a little bit of one of their workouts, and just constantly trying to learn and seeing where people that are doing it the best, what they value.

I'm consumed by greatness and learning why people or individuals or teams or groups achieve greatness. So just spent some time diving into that a little bit and trying to improve the mental aspect of it.

Q. Arkansas got Jonas Aidoo from Tennessee. Wondered what you thought about what kind of player Arkansas is getting.

LAMONT PARIS: Well, the obvious, he's long, athletic, he's growing as a player. He's been a fixture in this league. He's obviously a valuable asset. I hate to talk about people as assets, but he's a valuable asset to any organization at this level. I don't know him as a person, but he seems to be a very competitive guy. Appears to be a good teammate.

I don't know. They're getting a long, athletic, developing offensive skill guy that's very familiar with this league.

Q. Just wanted to ask you, in your experience, integrating freshmen and then transfers into your program, what are some of the challenges that come with the freshmen and maybe they haven't learned a system like yours before versus bringing in a transfer where maybe you have to reprogram some of the things they were doing at past programs?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, challenges exist for both of those. We've talked about that. I think the difference in the young guys and in the older guys that are new to this system, they've been around college basketball, and so I expect that the rate at which they acclimate to new things will be quicker than young guys. Young guys are young guys, and so two distinct challenges.

I think in terms of how much you push with those two different groups is going to be a little bit different. Your level of acceptance of continual mistakes -- I think you have a shorter, a smaller tolerance potentially for older guys that have been around that understand. I think they

understand stuff a little bit.

But yeah, we do, we have some young guys that will end up playing significant minutes for us, and we have some new faces into our program that are older that will play significant minutes for us.

And for us, what we do and how we go about our business is so important that I don't want to devalue at all the fact that we have a lot of returning guys. We have a lot of new faces. I think probably six of our top nine guys from last year are back.

And maybe some would argue that the top three are gone, but those next six guys are vital in terms of getting new guys, whether they be young guys or transfers, up to speed in terms of terminology, the communication aspect of -- it's one thing for me to show them or teach them something, but when they hear that voice coming from someone who's been in this program, that's won a lot of games, that understands it thoroughly, I just think the carryover is so much more important.

But yeah, it's a good question.

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