

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Tuesday, October 15, 2024

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Mike White

Men's Media Day Press Conference



MIKE WHITE: Great to see some faces that you see once a year, sometimes a few more times a year. But great to be back in Birmingham.

What can I answer?

Q. The commissioner just ran down your vast experience in this league. How much have you seen a change from 20-plus years ago, and can you pinpoint why it is you've gotten so much better, nine teams in the preseason 25?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, the obvious biggest change is just a better league in men's basketball. Men's basketball has caught some other sports in this league. Commissioner Sankey has done an amazing job.

The SEC Network I think has been a big factor. We've got a really high-level roster of coaches. The talent uptick, particularly in the last decade or so, continues. We're the best league in college basketball. We just are. The SEC is officially now the best league in college basketball.

Every year I stand up here and we're asked these questions, is it better -- yeah, it's incredible. Boy, it's better. It's even better this year. It's the best it's ever been. We'll say it again next year and we'll say it again the following year. It's amazing.

We're preseason 12, I guess? Is that what I read? We're significantly better. We're a good team. And obviously you hope to finish higher than that, but the team that finishes 12th, whoever that team may be, will probably be on the bubble, right, where seven years ago, 11 years ago, what have you, teams -- I know one in particular who finished second in the SEC and teams have finished fourth in the SEC that go to the NIT. We'll continue to get a bunch of teams in.

I think this will be a big breakthrough year to potentially have double-digit teams in, and it will only continue.

Q. Can you talk about RJ Godfrey transferring from Clemson and the impact he can have on your team and what his ceiling can be?

MIKE WHITE: Sure. RJ was part of a winning culture and a special year at Clemson, one of the best teams in the country, competed and complemented two all-league front court guys. We thought he was super underrated when he jumped in the portal. We pursued him aggressively, quickly. Very fortunate to coach him every day.

During the recruiting process, I talked to RJ about obviously defending and rebounding and scoring and X's and O's and style of play and all those things, but we were counting on him to be a change agent within our culture, to be a guy in our locker room that models what we're trying to do on a daily basis in rebuilding Georgia basketball, and he has done all of that.

I said if you come to Georgia, I'm going to bring you to media day. That's how important you are to the future of this program. He's the same guy every day. Plays extremely hard, tough, physical, aggressive. He's a winner, and I'm excited to coach him.

Q. When you were a point guard at Ole Miss, I thought the league was great because of players like you --

MIKE WHITE: Listen to you. I passed it to Keith and Ansu and ran to the corner before I turned it over, and I fouled so much they could only call five, which they often did, and I had to go sit by Coach Evans.

Q. You obviously made the transition within the league, Florida to Georgia. John Calipari is doing that from Kentucky to Arkansas. What's it like switching jobs within the league, and what do you think about a year ago we probably didn't think John would be at Arkansas; what are your thoughts on him being at Arkansas now?

MIKE WHITE: He's a really good coach, and he's going to



produce a winner wherever he is. With regards to me making a move, it seemed like it was 20 years ago now, so much has -- been through so much here these last 27 months or something like that.

It was just an opportunity that I was really excited about. I'm sure the same thing with Coach Cal, an opportunity to impact another program and have a different type opportunity, and we're enjoy it every day.

Q. Following up on Bob's question, just the transition at Kentucky with Pope taking over, what do you know about Pope, and what are you expecting him to do with that program?

MIKE WHITE: I'm sure he'll do a wonderful job. It's a big-time program, obviously, a proud program. I always enjoy our trips to Rupp Arena. He was a heck of a player, he's a heck of a coach.

I'm anxious. We're all, as coaches, we coach this game, and there's a business side of it. It's our career, obviously, but I think, at least speaking for myself, and I'm assuming in this league, we're all still fans of the game, as well. I'm anxious to see how Coach Cal's teams play at Arkansas. I'm anxious to watch these first few games and certainly Coach Pope at Kentucky, as well.

Q. Do you still hear the phrase "football school" when you're on the recruiting trail, or is it less, and how do you approach it?

MIKE WHITE: I think you hear that less and less in our league. It really doesn't matter. I'm the biggest Georgia football fan there is. My kids are rocking Georgia football gear. My little one is at the house, and they're big Kirby Smart fans and probably can reel off all the starters on offense and defense.

We sell it. Why would you not? Georgia football is absolutely rolling, as are many football programs in this league. It's all one big happy family.

I can tell you Coach Smart uniquely, as a Georgia grad, does whatever he can to help assist with resources, with recruiting, speaking engagement. You'll never hear him talk about Georgia football without talking about another sport. He's proud of the university, and I'm very thankful to him for that.

Q. Talk about Silas. He's coming into his sophomore year. Where do you expect to see his growth go going into the second year?

MIKE WHITE: His assist-turnover ratio -- Silas Demary,

that is -- and his three-point percentage has significantly improved over the course of the summer and the fall to complement, in my opinion, one of the best defensive and rebounding point guards in our league.

Ultra competitive, along the lines of RJ Godfrey, as we talked about earlier, a guy that brings it every day, that exemplifies that motor, that toughness, making winning plays type of a guy.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about Tyrin Lawrence obviously coming in from Vanderbilt. Having four years of SEC experience, how important is it to not just have experience when you get a transfer, but to get a guy with that much experience in the league, how big of an emphasis was that looking at him, and how big of an emphasis is that in recruiting in general?

MIKE WHITE: I think it's hit and miss with regard to the level at which you transfer from. I've seen high major transfer to a high major program that maybe underwhelms a little bit and vice versa. We've had low to mid major transfers that have had a ton of success. And then obviously you see some that you say, boy, it was a big jump from that level. I think each is an individual evaluation and process.

With him, though, having played in the league the last four years, it gives us a lot more familiarity with who he is as a player, in particular two years ago playing in Stegeman when he had a heck of a game against us, and we were saying to each other as a staff, boy, he's from right down the road.

So he gets in the portal, and just like RJ, pursued him aggressively. Wonderful young man. Talented defender, fast and quick, and he's made some big shots in his SEC career.

Q. I wanted to ask again about Mark Pope. He was a senior when you were a freshman. Do you remember the one matchup there at Rupp Arena? I know it was a lopsided loss, but --

MIKE WHITE: No, again, a fan of college basketball. I tell this story all the time. I want to say the final score was like 90 to 60. I've told this story so many times I probably Googled it one day to make sure I wasn't lying about the score.

But I want to say it was like 30 at halftime, and I remember Walter McCarty dunking balls under the rim. He'd land under the rim and just start jumping up and down and get into press. That's the way they played. They were a phenomenal team with a bunch of pros on that team.

I want to say that's the game that we got snowed in, as well, where -- I think we were forced to stay an extra night in Lexington before we could fly back. That team there was about as talented a college basketball team as I've seen, and you could go through that roster -- I want to say nine or ten of those guys played in the NBA if I'm not mistaken. Nine. How about that?

Q. Wanted to ask you, what are some of the differences when you're integrating a transfer into your program who maybe you're having to reprogram some of the things that they know the terminologies they use versus bringing in a freshman who you're maybe teaching something for the first time, and what are some of the differences in teaching those two groups?

MIKE WHITE: It's very different. It's a great question. The reprogramming you would think would provide more challenges than the natural freshmen, than what we were doing 10 years ago where we were bringing in five or six freshmen a year.

But I think it's neutralized by the experience, by the fact that you're a year or two or three years older, or four years older in Tyrin Lawrence's case, to where I know this is what you guys called it at your previous spot, this is what we call it, and boom, it's easier than you would think. There are some advantages, though, with a freshman, too, where it's all they've heard.

I think the buy-in, as well. I think that there's certain scenarios where some of these older transfers where I know you guys did this and had success with this, but this is the way we do it. I think it's important to have some of those conversations during the recruiting process to make sure the expectations meet.

Q. You've coached some really kind of gym-ratty guards over your career. Where are Silas and Blue in that group, and how good can this backcourt be?

MIKE WHITE: Good backcourt. Those guys are both improved. We talked about Silas earlier. Blue's passing ability, play-making ability has improved, his competitiveness, his defending and rebounding, to complement a guy who at 18 years old came in and made some shots, he's learning how to round out his game.

We've got some veteran guards with those guys, as well, and we've got a freshman point guard from Serbia in Savo who's a talented guy himself. Dakota Leffew, De'Shayne Montgomery.

We've got some talented guards, but we've got a really,

really good backcourt. And you look at all the backcourts in this league, and there's a bunch of them, but our guys are going to be competitive, for sure, and there's going to be nights where our guards outplay some other teams' in this league's guards.

But those guys are improving. Speedy is the best passer I've ever coached. Led the nation in assists. We had some really good guards at Florida. And then our first two years at Georgia, Terry Roberts had a really good year in year one, and Silas had a really good year last year.

Silas is competitive. He's growing every day. Excited about our sophomore backcourt but also some veterans and the freshmen that I talked about that complement those guys.

Q. How do you view Tyrin Lawrence factoring into your backcourt that has a few returners who have done some things in college?

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, Tyrin has gotten more experience. He's new to our system, of course, but he complements those guys. I don't know at this point who starts and who plays the most.

We've got a ton of parity with regard to projecting who's going to lead us in scoring or who's going to be the top two or three scorers. I just have no idea, nor do I care.

But he's a guy that brings it every day. Expect him to make an immediate impact, make a big impact on our program. He's got a chance to have a really good finish to his career in his fifth year.

Complements those guys. He's different than those two guys. He's got some similarities to De'Shayne Montgomery, but more experience. He had a really good practice yesterday.

Q. Mike, Jonas Aidoo is at Arkansas now, and I think he had 15 boards against you guys last year. Wondering what you think of him as a player and what kind of player Arkansas is getting.

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, skilled guy with a really good feel. He always appeared, in just evaluating him on film, that the game wasn't too fast for him. Quick thinker, underrated passer, shot blocker and alterer with really good hands and really good touch around the rim. A really good SEC player. I think he's Pre-Season All-League, which is about where it should be.

Q. You talked about the strength of the league, and I forgot, I'm pretty sure there were not nine football

teams in the preseason AP poll. I know it's preseason and stuff will change, but the fact that SEC basketball -- there's more SEC basketball teams ranked in the preseason poll than football teams --

MIKE WHITE: You said that, I didn't say that. That's crazy.

Q. I'm wondering what you think about that, and do you have some fun with that with your football people?

MIKE WHITE: No. SEC football is like the NFL, right; it's just incredible, and I'm a big fan. What SEC basketball has done in the past decade, as we talked about, is remarkable. Preseason is preseason, but it does speak to the depth of our league and the talent, the capability of so many teams in our league that can not only get to the tournament but potentially make a run in the tournament.

If you look at the rosters in our league, my goodness, I don't know who you look at and say, well, I think they'll be a little bit down this year. It's not in our league right now. You've got really good coaches and really good staffs, athleticism and size and talent, depth. I think we'll get double-digit teams in the NCAA Tournament this year.

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