

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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LSU Tigers

Coach Matt McMahon

Men's Media Day Press Conference



MATT McMAHON: Excited to be here today. Really honored to have with us two players, Jalen Reed, who's in his third year in the program, has had a terrific off-season. He's 6'10", 250 pounds now. Really expect him to take a big jump here as he enters year three.

And also Cam Carter, who's a transfer guard from Kansas State, native to Louisiana, averaged 15 points and five rebounds a game a year ago. Excited to have him back home, and really looking forward to the impact he'll have on our program.

I think for us as a team and especially as a program, we look to capitalize on the momentum that was created in the final months of the season last year with some of those big wins over great programs like Kentucky, South Carolina, enabling us to finish in the top half of the SEC.

Tried to transcend that into a great recruiting class, a top-10 class of three really talented freshmen, and then we signed three senior guards out of the portal, the aforementioned Cam Carter, Dji Bailey from Richmond, and then Jordan Sears from UT Martin.

Now it's trying to continue to build on that with another top-10 class, and just really excited about the direction of the program.

With that, I'd love to open it up for any questions.

Q. Obviously you mentioned Jordan Sears making the jump from UT Martin to the SEC, same jump you made from you left Murray State for LSU. What are the changes that come with that jump and how have you seen him take that on?

MATT McMAHON: Yeah, I love Jordan Sears. Of the 5,000-plus college players in the country a year ago, he was the only one with 650 points, 140 rebounds, 140

assists, and 75 made threes. He knows as well as all of us now it's how does that translate as he makes the jump to the SEC.

I think it starts with his mentality. He has great toughness, really explosive point guard, shoots the ball well with range.

I think the big adjustment when you come into the SEC, it's the No. 1 shot blocking league in the country. He has great quickness and speed, ability to get in the lane. When you get into the paint, you've got to be able to make great decisions because of the tremendous rim protection in this league.

I think that'll be part of the adjustment for him, but he's been terrific, and I expect him to have a big year for us.

Q. Curious with a guy like Will Baker and others who come back after transferring in for a second year in your program, how valuable are they not only being somebody that you hand picked to fill a role but now they can teach others and they're familiar with your system after a full year?

MATT McMAHON: Well, I think, not to overcomplicate it, but really you have three different areas as you're constructing your roster now in today's game. It starts with the player retention, the first bucket. Second bucket is the portal, and then third, the high school route.

We really love the player development piece, so I love being able to bring players in and have them in the program multiple years. That's why I talked about Jalen Reed when we first got started. I just love his growth and development. I think our new strength coach, Mike Chapman, has done a tremendous job with him. He's now 250 pounds. He's moving better than he ever has before, and I expect him to take another big jump.

He went to not shooting the three as a freshman, last year he shot it at 39 percent, now I want to see him get a higher volume of threes in addition to his ability to attack the rim and finish.



I think Mike Williams is a guy who averaged eight a game as a freshman, shot it 38 percent from three, has had a great off-season in the player development program and really has emerged as a leader on the team.

I think in this new era of college basketball, really identifying leaders in your program can be challenging, and Mike is a guy that's stepped up for us. So I think that retention piece is incredibly important.

Q. I wanted to ask you about a couple guys we didn't see play last year, Daimion Collins and Corey Chest. What can we expect to see from them this season?

MATT McMAHON: Yeah, really excited about both. Daimion got off to a little bit of a slow start. He ended up needing shoulder surgery. He's been cleared 100 percent. He's been full go since the 1st of August. But 6'9", 7'5" wingspan, really a once-in-a-lifetime athlete. I'll probably never coach someone like him again, from his speed and his verticality at the basket. He's gotten stronger in the weight room.

I think he's put himself in a position to really have a breakout-type season.

Corey Chest, one of the best instinctual rebounders I've had the opportunity to coach. He just has a great motor and energy, chases rebounds both ends of the court. I think when you look at our front court, both Daimion and Corey are certainly guys that will be big factors for us.

Q. Your thoughts on Mark Pope taking over the Kentucky program, an interesting transition for everybody in the league. And I want to dig in a little bit more on Daimion, his story, what he's gone through. How have you seen him grow mentally and maturity and things like that?

MATT McMAHON: I think touching on Daimion first, you know the story about the tragic passing of his father during his time at Kentucky. Can't imagine what that was like for him.

I think now a year under his belt at LSU, he seems very comfortable. He seems like he's really settled in and is ready to move forward with his basketball career. I think he's really matured.

But again, just a once-in-a-lifetime athlete, and his skill set is good. He can hit a catch and shoot three. He's got great hands around the basket. He's a great rim threat as a roller in our ball screen offense, and then his shot-blocking presence is going to be important for us, as you know, in this league. You have to have rim protection.

I'm really excited for him. I think he's handled adversity incredibly well and put himself in a position to have a breakout season for us.

Coach Pope, just familiar with the way they played at BYU, the pace of play, the spacing, the importance of the three-point shot. I thought they did a great job going out in the spring and through the transfer portal adding experienced players that have proven themselves at the highest level, and I expect them to be really good.

Q. Obviously you guys return a good nucleus from a group that defended a lot better. I think Bart Torvik had you in the top 30 the last month of the season defensively. How do you carry that over into this year with the new faces in the roster construction world with the portal?

MATT McMAHON: Well, we tried to be very intentional there. I mentioned the three portal seniors that we added in Dji Bailey and Sears and also Cam Carter. 45 points a game between them. But if you look at their defensive numbers, Dji Bailey was second in the Atlantic 10 in steals, incredibly high-IQ basketball player. I think he'll really impact us on the defensive side. Cam Carter was an elite defender on a top-20 defense in the country.

So we tried to identify not only our needs offensively, but we know how good the guards are in this league, and if you can't defend on the perimeter, you have no chance.

We have to continue to build on it. Some of the guys that have been asked about how do we protect the rim, we're built, constructed a little differently in our front court, not a lot of 260, 270-pounders. We're more long, athletic, high motor, high-energy guys, and so I think our pace of play needs to reflect that.

Q. Coach, you've coached against Johni Broome both when you were at Murray State and when he was a Morehead and now in the SEC. What kind of challenges does he bring matchup-wise?

MATT McMAHON: Yeah, it seems like it's been a decade or so coaching against him. But you've seen his game grow and develop. He's always been a dominant scorer around the rim. You look back at that Morehead State team, one of the best shot blockers in the country, and that's clearly translated here at the SEC level.

But now you see him shooting the three with time. The system is a great fit for him at Auburn with some of the things they do scheme-wise to get him the ball, not only on the block but in the mid-post area where he can score over

either shoulder.

I think there's a reason why a lot of people say he's the best big man in all of college basketball.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Jalen Reed. He's going to his junior year. Just how you expect to see his growth this year and how important he's going to be for you guys this year?

MATT McMAHON: Incredibly important. I believe in him. I love him. He's about the right things. He's really why you get into coaching. Very smart. It means something to him. He really cares. So he works extremely hard to try and become the best player he can be.

I think he's really matured this off-season as he enters year three. I mentioned in my opening, he's gained 15 pounds of muscle, but I think he's moving better than he ever has before.

I think he's a guy that we'll depend on heavily, not only for his ability to score off the bounce, but I think he's a unique player at 6'10", 250, that can create offense for his teammates. He knows he has to lower his turnover rate. It was way too high a year ago.

Then I also mentioned his three-point shooting. He really was not a threat his freshman year. Last year as a sophomore, 39 percent, shot it really well. I want to see him increase that three-point volume. Doesn't need to take 10 or 12 a game, but we'd like to see him shoot it more because he's really worked hard to develop into a good three-point shooter.

Q. Coach, I wanted to ask you about the staff additions. I know you hired a new associate head coach, and of course Jalen Courtney-Williams, as well. Talk about those additions to your staff and what they bring.

MATT McMAHON: It's been awesome for us. I think when you're hiring staff members, you're looking to add new energy, new ideas, new experiences. Obviously recruiting connections in this profession.

But we were able to hire two of the best in the business in David Patrick, who's twice been a head coach. He's been a part of Elite Eight teams. He's recruited and developed the No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft. He's had multiple guys in the first round. He's really brought a lot to our team and our program. Was also an assistant coach for Australia this past year in the Olympics, joining Mark Few as the only two college coaches in the Olympics this year.

And then Jalen Courtney-Williams, a guy who started his career at LSU as a player. Loves Baton Rouge. Great charisma, great personality, high-energy coach on the floor, very good teacher.

I'm thrilled about both and the impact they've made on our program, and I think both understand the value and importance of relationships and player development.

And then the third that I mentioned, our new strength coach who comes to us from Stanford, Mike Chapman, Baton Rouge native, but has been just doing an outstanding job with our players. I think we're in the best shape we've ever been in during my time at LSU. I mentioned Jalen Reed, Daimion Collins, some of those gains in the weight room.

All three incredibly impactful, and will continue to be moving forward.

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