

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Mississippi State Bulldogs Coach Sam Purcell

Women's Media Day Press Conference



(Interview joined in progress due to technical issues.)

SAM PURCELL: -- which I call oo-wee capability and oo-wee moments, Eniya Russell, she's that kid. For us to be able to coach her in one year, we won the lottery. I'm excited what we can do this year and finish her college clear.

Q. Obviously Jessika Carter, a real tough player to replace. You can't replace her with one individual. Where do you see things with the post player rotation? You've got a returner with Montague and some newcomers there.

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, obviously Jessika, what a great story, as we all know. So happy for how she finished her career at Mississippi State. Then get drafted in the WNBA.

A lot of opportunity because Jessika was a kid who played 30 minutes a game, which is unheard of in the post position. Like you mentioned, you've got Nir, who was one of the top 50 high school recruits in the country two years ago that has waited her turn, who has played behind her, is ready to seize her moment.

We were lucky we can get Kayla Thomas in the transfer portal. That's a young lady that's going to shock a lot of people. Her college career, because, again, this is the last year of COVID kids, started at Penn State. She has been phenomenal for what we're trying to do, mold into a team for what she brings.

I have a sleeper, Madina, from Kenya. This young lady is special. I'm going to share a little story with you.

She arrived this fall. All summer a lot of my kids were practicing for a conditioning test that usually takes three months to pass. She arrives the first week at school. I look at her, she said, Hey, Coach, I want to take the

conditioning test.

I said, Why not.

She passed it in two days.

She's special, has a motor for days, but most of all she has a joy of being at Mississippi State. Between those three along with Powe, she's a stretch forward, I'm excited to have two in, two out, have a rotation where we can avoid foul trouble and have plenty of bodies to throw out there no matter what the opponent brings at us.

Q. Speaking of transfers, kind of run the other end of Maryam Dauda's career game last year at Arkansas. What kind of player is South Carolina getting with her?

SAM PURCELL: Special. I got a chance to watch the game last night. You think the old South Carolina used to be let's pack it in, make them beat you from the outside. That scouting report is over with. Dawn has done a phenomenal job. She's got some of the best players in the country. Someone like her can not only play inside and out, so I know she'll bring a lot to that team this year.

Q. Why was it important to bring Victoria Vivians back to Starkville? What has she meant to the program?

SAM PURCELL: It's everything. First of all, I think I'm a good recruiter. I'm no dummy, right? When you walk in there, first of all, she's the queen. I only know two queens in my life, one is Beyonce and one is Victoria. I was lucky to land Victoria on my staff. When you do this business, it's more about winning games, it's about impacting lives. That's what Victoria does.

Think about the lens for my young women who have a lot of aspirations and dreams to play at the next level, and you currently have a staff member who is in the league, who has great resources and connections to motivate them and talk to them, to tell 'em what it takes to get there.

Most importantly, like I shared when I took the job three years ago, this vision is real, all right? This program was in the national championship not too far long ago. You know



what, she was on that team.

When we're getting in that practice gym and we're fighting and competing, she has a certain voice about her that she believes in that vision because she lived it.

When we talk about maximizing your education, she's done that as a graduate. Like I said, to have dreams after Mississippi State, she's currently living that. I couldn't be more happy to have her on staff, what she's bringing to us.

On top of that, as much as she's bringing to us, I'm excited, and this is how I'm standing here today. I had great mentors who poured into me, who gave me an opportunity and a platform. Down the line there's no doubt that that young lady has what it takes. We're trying to make sure we pour into her so when her opportunity comes to be a head coach down the line, she's ready to seize it and keep playing in this great game we're playing in right now.

Q. A lot of new faces on this roster. What is your philosophy when it comes to bringing a bunch of new talent together and instilling your system?

SAM PURCELL: Yes, great question.

So it's simple: fail fast, learn quick. We are doing everything possible in practice to create failure. I mean positive failure.

One, what set are we going to need to run when the game's on the line? Who are my dogs when we're down five points that I've seen in practice when the lights come on I know who to go to? Who is going to take that shot that we need to get us the lead or be the one that's going to be the game winner?

We've had a great mindset in that. Then outside of just trying to create a practice environment, it's get to know each other as people, right? This is really simple. The better we understand each other, where we come from, but most importantly believe in each other. If we can have an attitude that we'll run through a brick wall, I like what's going to come when the season arrives.

Q. Could you speak a little bit about the impact of having a guard like Jerkaila Jordan back?

SAM PURCELL: I'm the luckiest coach in the world, right?

First of all, no offense, I love you media, but I think we made a mistake in leaving off that young lady for a second for All-SEC. We're talking about a lady, real quick, where she was 16 points per game. Team best. Fourth best returning mark in the SEC. Ranked 10th in the SEC in '23,

'24. Not only an offensive player, you're talking about a two-way player.

Defensively she was 2.1 steals per game, which put her at six in the SEC last year and currently the fourth best returning mark in the SEC this year.

When you've got that experience, you've got a young lady that bleeds Mississippi State, especially in a time and an era in the transfer portal that you can leave. She was hurt last year that we were one game short of making the NCAA tournament. She didn't run from it.

She was a main part of bringing the talent that I have on my team right now, and she wants to make sure she leaves Mississippi State the right way and gets us back in the NCAA tournament and leaves her mark. I believe she's going to have one heck of a year doing it.

Q. I wanted to ask you, you kind of revamped your coaching staff in the off-season. You've talked about Victoria. The other three, you hired four new assistant coaches, could you talk about that.

SAM PURCELL: Yeah, I'm lucky. Think about this. I'm in my third year as a head coach. I got a coaching tree, right? Unbelievable. Again, that's why I'm proud of the culture and product we're building at Mississippi State. I want not only my players to reach their dreams, I want my assistants to reach theirs as well.

Last year I had two assistant coaches who went on to be head coaches. I'm so happy for them and their opportunities in this next stage of life. That freed up an opportunity to go out and hire some new coaches, all right? Obviously you never think you're going to have to do that at the end of the year. When great opportunities come, I want that for my people.

I was able to win the lottery, right? I was able to hire three former head coaches. First and foremost in Fred Castro, I have a long friendship that I've known over 20 years. He's a brilliant mind, but most importantly he's a great teacher.

Then I was able to hire Anita Howard, another former head coach who has an energy I love and a passion for the game that you know it when you meet her right away.

Last but not least is my day one in Samantha Williams. We started in this business 20 years ago at Auburn. We worked together. We competed together for Final Fours and national championships at Louisville. Obviously she was at Tennessee last year. She understands what it takes to win in the SEC, but most importantly she's a winner.

I'm very fortunate to have a great staff. Most importantly, like anybody knows, when you have three former head coaches, I'm a lot better head coach now because they understand the small things are very big. They take a lot off my plate. I'm very excited about the season.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

SAM PURCELL: Thanks, everybody.

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