

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Texas Longhorns

Coach Vic Schaefer

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: From our new member universities, Vic Schaefer from the University of Texas.

VIC SCHAEFER: Thank you. Me and the commissioner have known each other a long time. In our career paths, we have come a long way. As the old saying goes...

Excited about the opportunity to be here today as the head coach at the University of Texas. Excited to have Rori Harmon and Madison Booker with me, two outstanding young ladies that are not only great players but are two tremendous young ladies.

We're excited to be a part of this conference. I'm very familiar with the conference obviously, as I spent six years as an assistant in Arkansas and eight years as the head coach at Mississippi State. Back in some familiar stomping grounds.

I don't know how this is supposed to run.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go to some questions.

VIC SCHAEFER: All right.

Q. The Gary Blair tree that reaches across this conference, what is it like going from arena to arena and you'll face from coaches that come from the same tree, upbringing in their coaching?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, I was with him 15 years. He's had several assistants throughout his career. There's several of us out there that are still doing it, still in this great game.

I think, again, Coach and I, we were together a long time, won a lot of games together. We had some great, great experiences together both at Arkansas and at Texas A&M.

He's so special to me. Being with him 15 years, seven-

eight-time Hall of Famer. Shame on you if you don't learn anything being around him. I learned so many valuable lessons that have allowed me to have any of the success that I've had.

It's pretty special. I think as a head coach now, I try to do some of those same things, mentor and develop coaches. I've had four former players on my staff forever. This year I only have two. For the last four, five, six years I've had four former players on my staff, just trying to give them an opportunity to get in the game.

I think that's our job, it's part of what we do as head coaches. Certainly Coach did that, as well. Still talk to him regularly. He's somebody that I love dearly. Again, he's somebody that I really appreciate.

I'll tell you this about Coach Blair. Nobody knows the history of our game or appreciates the history of our game more than that man. He's made an unbelievable impact in my life and I'm forever grateful.

Q. We know the league got stronger in women's basketball with you and Oklahoma joining. How much has women's basketball in the SEC evolved since you started, even since Mississippi State?

VIC SCHAEFER: You have to remember, when I got in the league, you had powerhouses. Pat Summitt's teams, Georgia with Coach Landers. Joe Ciampi was finishing up his career and had some great teams at Auburn. It was a monster league then.

As a young coach, I could remember sitting courtside at SEC tournaments scouting. That's when you really as an assistant sit there and go, When I become a head coach, I want my team to look like that team. I want my team to play like that team.

I really have tried throughout the course of that time, you go from '97, '98, my first year at Arkansas, we finished sixth, and we made it to the Final Four. Where we are today...

I think it's a different time and a different day. I think the

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parity that we have in our league right now is really incredible. Back then you had some really dominant teams, then you had some teams that maybe they couldn't beat those top teams.

In our league right now on any given night, if you're not ready to play, you won't get beat, you'll get embarrassed.

We have Hall of Fame coaches, future WNBA players night in and night out. I think leaving the league that I just left to come to this one, all I did was jump out of the frying pan and into the grease. It's a monster. You have to prepare for that.

I think that's why our coaches and conference are so adamant at staying at 16. Our league is that good. Every year we still have a large amount of teams making the NCAA tournament because of that.

It's a challenge night in and night out. But I think I've been able to see front row an evolution of a conference. Again, I think the parity is what really separates us right now.

Q. What have you not seen from Madison Booker yet? You're welcoming back Rori. What will she bring to this team?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think last year I saw a little bit of everything from Madison. As a freshman, as a young player, early in her career, having that woven blanket in Rori Harmon as your point guard, running your team.

I said this earlier, I thought Rori was really, really good last year, was on pace to have a First-Team All-American season, as well.

But I thought she created, Madison, a lot of opportunities for Rori. Of course, Rori being a point guard, she creates opportunities for everybody.

When Rori went down, most of the time, y'all, in basketball, when your point guard goes down, your two guard is who you might lean on. We went to our three player in Madison.

I knew, after recruiting Madison her entire high school career and knowing the team I had last year, Madison Booker was the answer. It wasn't a tryout. That's who was going to be our point guard.

While we had some bumps in the road along the way early, the kid has so much presence for such a young player. She had tremendous presence on the floor. Nothing rattled her. Her first three or four minutes in the very first game against Baylor when we only had three days to get

ready, that was the worst of the worst. After that, I took her out. And then when we put her back in, I never saw that again. She was really ready to embrace the role that she was in.

You have to give the kid a ton of credit. What she was able to do, leading that team. That team won 33 games. In the history of Texas women's basketball, they've only won more games one time, and that's when they won the national championship in 1986. They were 34-0. That team would not have been that if it hadn't been for Madison Booker embracing being the point guard.

Now you fast forward to where we are now. There's nobody more excited on our team that Rori Harmon is back than Madison Booker. She wants to get back on the wing where she's really comfortable.

I think it allows us as a team, we have a lot of flexibility there. We have a special freshman in Bryanna Preston, who is going to be an unbelievable point guard for us.

But Rori's presence, how hard she plays, the energy that she plays with permeates through my team every day, every game. I think she really is a settling influence on my entire team. It gives my team a lot of confidence. It gives her head coach a lot of confidence to know that we have her back on the floor leading our team.

It's a really good feeling to know we've got great guard play. You win with guard play in basketball. You can have all the size in the world. You don't have guard play, you got no chance. We've got guard play this year, and I've got depth at guard play with Bry and Jordan Lee, two exceptional freshmen. Laila Phelia, y'all, is a monster. She's going to be so good. Shay Holle has been the glue to my program for the last few years.

I just named off five, six guards that they're all going to play every night, and they're going to play a lot. They're all going to impact our team.

I think our team, our future is in really good shape at the guard spot. This year's team, we finally have some depth. I just haven't had it the last couple years. Give those teams credit, they've learned how to stay out of foul trouble and play through some issues. This year's team, we finally have depth.

Q. You were talking about Laila Phelia. What do you envision her impact on your team this season?

VIC SCHAEFER: Laila, she's perfect for how we want to play, how I like to play. She's a great teammate. She's a great kid. She's tough and competitive. I would have

loved to have had her for four years. I'm blessed to get her for one year.

She just brings so much to the table. She's really an aggressive offensive player. She cares defensively. She's trying to learn a new system. Get a crash course in that. She's had some injuries this summer which have kind of slowed her. She's finally healthy and has really looked good. This last week she's looked really good, like a million dollars. I've even played her at some point because she is really good reading ball screen defense.

She brings a lot to the table. She can score at all three levels. She's smart. Heady. She sees the floor extremely well. She's going to be a great complement to my other guards. She, along with Shay, two seniors. We lose Shaylee Gonzales. Those two I can plug in. One of them is going to start, one of them is going to have a chance to be the Sixth Player of the Year because they're that good.

It's not a problem. I hate to say it's not a problem. It's a great thing to have. Again, excited about the opportunity to coach her. Again, she's a great kid, man. She's just really, really a perfect fit for us.

Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, your second to last year at Mississippi State was Coach Yo's first year at Ole Miss. Considering what Ole Miss' program was at the time to now, is it any surprise to see her turn it around, to where it is now?

VIC SCHAEFER: Well, I think you said it, where they are today and where they were then is way different. I haven't been in the league since then. I've had my own problems, concerns in my own league that I was in. I haven't paid that much attention.

I know that she was very successful where she was before she went to Mississippi. Does it surprise me? No, she was very successful where she was. I think obviously when you finish in the top four three years in a row in this league, you're doing something.

Again, the bottom line is it all comes down to recruiting for all of us. I think she's done a great job. Again, we all recruit to a fit. I think she's done a great job. The secret to our success has been recruiting to a fit, retaining our student-athletes, and developing 'em. Over the course of time, we've been pretty successful in all three of those phases.

For her, it doesn't surprise me at all. Certainly happy for her. I know that blood feud in that state. I know how that is (smiling). I lived it for eight years. There's no middle ground. I know the competition and the competitive spirit

that she has as well as Sam now, we had when I was there, it's really special.

I'm really happy for her and her staff. Again, that's what happens when you work hard and you have a plan.

Q. Johnnie Harris talked about you. She said you'll be like a brother to her. Any surprise to you - I'm guessing not - that Auburn has gotten better year after year under her leadership?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, no, it's no surprise. She was with me all eight years at Mississippi State. She's lived it. She's seen it every day. She was a big part of it, big reason why we were able to do what we did.

When I was recommending her for that job, there was no question in my mind she was ready and she could do it. She knows what the recipe is. When you start interviewing with people and talking to people, you have to take over, there's nothing harder.

Y'all in this room, you should know it, if you don't, I don't care what sport it is in the Southeastern Conference, you want to take a daunting task, go take over one of the bottom teams in this league, whatever sport you're going to take over, and try to build it and pass people up. It's almost impossible. It's so daunting.

Again, she was a big part of what we did at Mississippi State. It doesn't surprise me she's been able to do it at Auburn. I knew she could. I knew she would. She knows what the recipe is. Certainly I'm happy for her.

We were together a long time. We had a lot of good times together. Not enough time in the day for me to share 'em, but we had a lot of good times together.

Q. You talked about what Madison Booker can do for your team. She was one of the players to receive pre-season SEC Player of the Year. What does that say about her receiving that recognition first year in the conference?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think it's a lot of respect involved. Anytime you get a pre-season acknowledgment, there's a lot of respect for those folks that are voting on that.

Again, it's in the body of work that she did as a freshman. The accomplishments that she had and what she was able to do with our team, the impact she had on our team after we obviously had a devastating loss in Rori.

To me, she'll tell you, I'll say it's well-earned, but now you got to go live it. Her and Rori both received I think

Pre-Season All-Conference recognition.

I think with Madison, there's a lot of respect for what she did a year ago across the country. People were able to see her and see the success that she had in leading our team.

Again, she didn't just get us through a season. She didn't just lead us to an okay. We were in the Elite Eight, won a conference championship tournament, won 33 games. We wouldn't have had anything close to that if it hadn't have been her embracing a role that she didn't come to Texas to be the point guard, yet she was thrown into that role. Man, she just embraced it, ran with it, did an unbelievable job.

I'm excited for her. I'm excited for our team. Again, it's well-earned. She's earned that respect. Again, I'm excited that I get to look up and see her every day on the basketball court. Another great kid. Tremendous young lady and competitor. Man, she's a competitor.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

VIC SCHAEFER: Thanks everybody for being here. Appreciate what you do for our great game and for your coverage. Praise the Lord and hook 'em Horns.

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