

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Yolett

McPhee-McCuin

Women's Media Day Press Conference



Lot of growth. We're excited to have some of our players return. Madison Scott, she is Ole Miss women's basketball. This is her fifth year. Made SEC Second Team preseason rankings.

KK Deans, who we lost after winning the championship last year, in The Bahamas, is back and healthy.

We went into the portal and filled some spots that we thought we needed and brought in what I think is an incredibly unique freshman class, all international, hailing from Mali, Africa, Brazil, Portugal and Slovenia.

We're excited about our group. I love our team. I'm ready -- I'm not ready to get started. I'd be lying if I said that I am (smiling). Anybody who's ready to get started right now, I don't know. I don't think anybody's ready to get started. It's near, it's coming. The temperature has changed. We're here.

Like I said, I'm very grateful to play in the Southeastern Conference. I have an immense amount of joy about being the head coach at the University of Mississippi. We look forward to having a hopeful and healthy season.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Let's go to questions.

Q. You mentioned opening the season in Paris. After seeing what kind of amazing thing that was last year, what does it mean to have your program participate this year?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: When we got the call, we were ecstatic. Immediately I said yes, but I didn't ask for permission. I had to dial it back (smiling).

But our administration, from the chancellor down, was in full support. That is something that I appreciate at Ole Miss. They understand the balance of wanting to win championships obviously, but the student-athlete experience.

So we're going to play a basketball game, but we're going to go up early enough to have a chance to explore Paris and see what it's about, use it as an educational tool for

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Yolett McPhee-McCuin to the stage from Ole Miss.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Good evening. I know that you all have been going all day, so I'll try to keep this short and sweet to keep you engaged. If you're anything like my student-athletes, you got about 10 minutes in you (smiling).

In 2024, the climate that we're in, I'm just really blessed that this is my seventh season at the University of Mississippi. I'm excited about what's to come in our league. I think our league, this is not coach speak, I think our league is the best league in the nation. I'm grateful and blessed to be a part of it.

We have a lot to be excited about in Oxford. We have seven returners, seven new players, and just a lot of energy and excitement. A great, healthy balance of old and young. I think that you need that to be competitive in the Southeastern Conference.

We have an incredibly competitive schedule. We open up this season in Paris versus the University of Southern California. We were luckily picked to play a Final Four participant in the SEC-ACC Challenge in NC State. We go to The Bahamas, I don't know who picked that, but this is our third year in a row going back home (smiling). We play Boston College. If we're successful against them, we get a chance to play the Connecticut Huskies.

Needless to say, we have beefed up our non-conference schedule simply because our conference schedule has beefed up. I know that sounds crazy. For me, I'd rather our players have a chance to dive into the competitive space before we get into what I call the baby WNBA, which is the SEC.



our student-athletes.

Q. What do you like about having a roster that has a balance of domestic players and international players?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: What I like about it is you have experience from different backgrounds, right? All of my freshmen that are international players have played for their national teams. They are experienced when it comes to playing high-level basketball in Europe and in Africa. That is something that was exciting for me.

Nowadays, you can't be that young, all right? You won't be around to see them grow, so... There needs to be a balance of having the mature, the experience. We were able to retain our starters with KK, Madison Scott, Kennedy Todd-Williams, then others. I think we retained like eight. That was important for us, especially in the environment that we're in when people are leaving and they have the right to do so.

We focus on retaining those pieces. I think we have a healthy balance. I'm excited about it. A lot of newness still. But that is what it is for us nowadays. We're glorified ju-co coaches, if you ask me. We got two years to make something shake, then we got another crop coming in. That is our environment now, one that I've adjusted to and embrace.

Q. The NCAA has eliminated the national letter of intent. Do you have any concerns about how that may affect programs in the future?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Honestly, I hadn't educated myself enough on it to say how I truly feel.

Full transparency, I'm numb because there's always a change. Every day is a change. I kind of go with the ebbs and flows of the changes. I leave that up to the powers that be.

For us, we would like to be able to maintain our roster and know who's on our roster. I love the freedom that our student-athletes get. I hadn't dove deep enough in it to know how it will impact us.

At the end of the day, the NCAA is going to put the student-athletes first. We have to adapt and we have to adjust. Kind of have to wait and see. Ask me after signing day how I feel about it (smiling).

Q. When KK Deans went down with the ACL injury, what impressed you the most about the way she handled her recovery process, especially going through it a second time? When you go through the

portal process with Tameiya Sadler, what ultimately attracted you to her? How did you see that vice versa?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Well, we were devastated when KK went down. She's the heartbeat of our team, an extension of me. Really had been working hard and had big goals.

I've always been impressed with KK's tenacity and toughness. But after seeing her go through the process of returning after this ACL injury, I'm even more inspired by just her character and her will to want to be back and be there for the team.

We had a lot of success last year, but she had a lot to do with that. She became a coach on the bench. She was a great ear for our players. We are excited to have her back.

When it comes to Tam, I think I got a little PTSD with KK going down. I wanted to get some other -- another experienced point guard, lead guard in. We went out and started scouring the portal. We utilized the portal to get pieces we need. We're not greedy. We don't just jump in there and get whatever we can.

She was just someone we needed. We needed maturity. We needed someone that came from a winning program in Colorado. I have tons of respect for Coach JR. I called her and asked her about Tam. She was supportive and had great things to say about her.

Our job was to convince her to come to the 'Sip. We're glad that she's here.

Q. As a coach who sends players to the WNBA, your thoughts on this season, the spike in popularity, more eyes, but also everything that came with it in terms of the heightened racism and online abuse of a lot of players?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: That sounded great when you started and said someone who sends players to the league. I was like, Yeah, that's us (smiling).

I think the league is at a growth stage. Anytime you have growth, it's going to be good and bad. Yeah, I'm not one to say you have to take the good with the bad. I just know that the good and the bad comes when you're trying to elevate anything, right?

But I don't condone it. I'm heartbroken when I hear the stories about players being stalked and attacked, the verbal abuse. Sometimes where the media takes it, social media. When I say 'the media', I'm not attacking you all. I'm talking being the media as a whole.



But I think we'll get to the other side of it. It's a beautiful sport. We have beautiful people in the sport that come from all different backgrounds and represent all facets of our world, right?

I think that once we get over the shock of the negativity that comes with it and we start to balance it out, it will continue to blossom. I just saw Stewy and Phee, they're unrivaled. That's crazy, TNT, just having that exposure, I think it just shows that women's basketball is an entity and product that needs to be invested in. We have a new deal here in the SEC. It's legitimate. We're going to continue to grow.

Hopefully we can educate the new fans that come in to be comfortable with our game and what it represents, allowing it to be different from maybe men's basketball but still appreciating it for a high-level sport that it is.

Q. Both of your players today commented on how much you have taught them as far as being women outside of basketball. They commented strongly on how much of an impact you made. In turn, how have they, being part of your family, coming to your kids' games and stuff, impacted and changed your life?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Whew... I would go over my time limit of 10 minutes that we discussed and agreed upon.

My players teach me something new every single day. When we recruit, I always tell our coaches, Let's have people around us that we wouldn't mind our kids around. That's one thing I'm proud to say about the young women on my team. They're great people. I don't mind them being around my kids, being examples for my two daughters.

We're a family. They accept me for who I am. I appreciate that because I'm a ball of fire in practice. They kind of just allow me to be that. They don't try to change me. They don't complain about it. They appreciate the difference of when I'm on the court versus when I'm off the court.

I love 'em. I want to see 'em win. So every day I think I go into work saying, If I be to them what they need me to be, in return they will be inspired to be for me what we need them to be.

I think we have that partnership and that understanding. But it comes first with the character, just awesome people.

Q. You were talking about the 'Sip earlier when I asked you the previous question. When you first took the job

in 2018, you were asked about the pressure of being at Mississippi State. Now that you've had the upper hand, finished the top four in the SEC, playing against them, what has that particular series meant to you?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I tell you one thing, I learned quickly that we're going to hold it down for Oxford, Mississippi, the flagship.

Here's the thing. I love rivalries. For me, I got right into it right away. But I also love the game. I love the sport. I have a great amount of respect for all of the coaches. So I have tons of respect for Sam.

Every time we play, I want to beat his butt. I think he wants to beat me, too. We can both appreciate that.

I think rivalries just show the passion that universities, towns, people have. I'm proud to be on this side with the Rebels.

Q. You've obviously elevated the program. You're getting to the NCAA tournament. What does it take to get from that level to where LSU was two years ago or South Carolina last year?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: I think it takes a little bit of luck. You got to get a good draw. That's why we're playing such a competitive non-conference. When I talk to Dawn Staley, Kim Mulkey, well, Dawn, she plays an incredibly tough schedule all the time. It's kind of contrasting. Kim has her style and Dawn has her style.

For us, we want to try to get a home-court advantage. In order for us to get one of the top four seeds and host at home, we can't duck any smoke. We have to play the best. We have to show that we are a program that's worth being considered to be in that top four.

How do you do it? You got to go play those teams. That is something that we have decided as a program. We were prepared and in a situation to do so with this year's roster.

As far as continuing to build a program, we just have to win. We have to sell our university, sell the vision for every student-athlete that we go after, every prospect. Then we have to get the right people on board. We have to continue to have depth in our roster. I think we try to do that with the type of players that we've brought in.

We have to have some luck. We have to be able to be resilient throughout the whole season and capitalize on games. All games matter in the Southeastern Conference, but in the non-con, we have a lot of opportunities to make a statement. We have to try to capitalize on them.

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THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Thank you.

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