

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

**Georgia Bulldogs**

**Coach Mike White**

Men's Media Day Press Conference



me and some others probably in this room in that we're in the SEC, right? I've been in the SEC, as I was talking with Daymeon Fishback about, since we were both 18 years old. We both have an affinity for this league, for each institution in this league. It was really cool to see 14 go.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium University of Georgia head coach Mike White.

MIKE WHITE: Great to be here. Opening statement? Proud of what we're rebuilding at Georgia and proud to join Blue Cain and Dylan James as we made the trip up here this morning. Apologize for the way we had to pivot. Plane issue. We weren't late, it was a plane issue.

Highest seed in 20 years is what we try to sell in recruiting. Feel like we've got a chance to be very good this year again. Proud about what we've accomplished in terms of the basketball environment and atmosphere in Stegeman Coliseum. Our administration has been incredible, allowing us to make those changes, and our fan base being open to that change and embracing it at this point.

We had some big-time home-court advantage opportunities last season. In addition, this might be the only time I can say this in coaching, I hope not, we had 13 guys take summer school this past summer and had 13 on the honor roll, had a 3.79 GPA. Our guys continue to excel on and off the court. Really proud to coach 'em. We got a great group.

I'd love to answer any questions.

**Q. Last year on this stage, if I remember correctly, you said you felt the SEC could get double-digit teams into the NCAA tournament. What did you see about the league that made you that confident going into last year, and do you see a lot of the same this year?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, I'm glad you pointed out last year and not the previous three where I probably said the same thing.

We finally broke through. It was an historical year, absolutely incredible, probably a little bit more unique to

We saw it coming, right? Probably about halfway through the non-conference when all of us took care of our business versus the mid-major opponents, then won some quality games against some of the other conferences. Obviously in the challenge we had an incredible record. Hope to have again this year. It will be a little more challenging, I anticipate.

Our league was abnormally old last year. We had an incredible amount of experience. Our league is not as experienced. Do I anticipate us still being the best league in college basketball? I do. I really do. Be hard to match what we did last year. I know we're all going to aim to do the same thing. I'm sure we're locked in on our own team and growth and development. That's where we are at Georgia.

It's going to be another great year in the SEC. We'll see how great.

**Q. Blue Cain is coming into his third year as a junior. What makes him so special? He's made such great strides from freshman to sophomore. How do you keep cultivating him to get better? How have you been pushing him this off-season?**

MIKE WHITE: Blue has matured as much from an intangible standpoint as anyone I've coached. I probably put a handful of those guys into one category. I have coached for a long time now.

I'm really proud to coach a guy that's made that big of a jump in terms of his level of accountability, his approach to practice, his approach to being coached, his modeling of behavior and the way that we play. He's becoming an extension of us on our staff.

He's turned into a winning player and a culture guy. Two years ago he was a freshman that was hoping to jog into

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an open three and make a shot, right? Really proud of him.

He's tough as nails. That's probably his greatest strength, his greatest characteristic.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

MIKE WHITE: Absolutely not. He's definitely aerodynamic. He's gotten a little quicker. He's super competitive and really tough.

**Q. Dylan James, the older guys, Blue, what have you seen from those guys with leadership with a group that has a lot of new faces?**

MIKE WHITE: Those two guys have stepped up. They've been really good, really consistent in practice. Pat asked about Blue. Dylan is as consistent as anyone I've ever coached. Asa was like that last year. Dylan is right there with him. Their mentality on the court is a little bit different.

Dylan, in terms of leading by example, being a guy you can point to as a staff every day, having the opportunity to say to his teammates, Hey, man, look at this guy, this is how it's supposed to be done. This is how he did it on Monday, how he did it yesterday, doing it again the right way today. He's incredibly consistent. He's really versatile.

Neither of those two guys are big rah-rah guys. We always challenge our guys to lead with their own personality. Those two guys have learned how to do so.

**Q. When you got to Georgia, you were in the 300s in defensive efficiency. You finished 32nd last year.**

MIKE WHITE: I think it's the greatest improvement defensively. There's only one direction to go. We've gotten better. Hopefully we can match that this year.

Didn't mean to cut you off.

**Q. When you went about roster construction, you focused on making sure you took care of the ball better.**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah.

**Q. Do you feel like you can duplicate that sort of defensive intensity?**

MIKE WHITE: We're optimistic that we can. Probably five, ten games in, we'll have a better feel for where we are defensively.

I do think it's going to be different. Our roster makeup is different in a bunch of different ways. Just from a defensive standpoint, we're not as big, not as physical, but we're a little bit quicker and faster. I think that we could potentially -- our aim, at least, is to create more turnovers, extend pressure a little bit more, differently than last year.

I hope we can hold our own on the glass. I think we'll score a little bit easier, die. We'll shoot it better. We'll certainly pass it better. It's the most skilled passing team that I've had the opportunity to coach in years. It really is.

Defensively hope to be as good. Our guys are working at it. But definitely different.

**Q. The guys we have spoken to so far, talking about the perimeter shooting, guys like Dylan and Blue, they say this is going to be a lot better shooting team than it was last season. You kind of feel that same way?**

MIKE WHITE: Yeah, definitely. How do you become a better shooting team? You sign a bunch of good shooters, right?

Justin Bailey from Wofford I want to say shot 46, off the top of my head. I'll give you stats. I might be wrong on a couple of these because the recruiting season was over a few months ago.

They're shooting well in practice. Bailey made a ton of threes. Smurf Milender made a ton of threes at a high clip at UTSA. Jeremiah Wilkinson is a good shooter, but a really good scorer. Blue is shooting it better. Dylan is shooting it better. Jordan Ross has an ability to make a three. Jake Wilkins has been a pleasant surprise as a true freshman in practice. Kareem Stagg can step out and make threes. Kanon Catchings is as good of a shooter as anyone on our team. We have a number of guys that can make shots. We've got to take good shots, we got to share it, defend, rebound.

Next to shooting, again, our passing, just significantly improved overall. Pretty good passing team. One of the better passing teams that I've coached. Hopefully I'm not eating those words 10 games in.

**Q. Somto stepped in and made a pretty real day-one impact. What are you expecting year two?**

MIKE WHITE: Somto is one of the best shot-blockers in the country. Defensive physicality, presence, length. 7'6" wingspan, 40-inch vertical leap. Working on his conditioning. The challenge every day is just fighting through that discomfort, to be a guy that can improve his motor and make multiple efforts.

He finishes at a high clip, too. He did last year. He's working to improve at the foul line. He's shooting a really high percentage in practice right now, which gets you excited about his offense, but also gets you worried about your interior defense.

But he's a guy we need to have a big year. We expect him to make a big jump from his freshman to sophomore season.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time today.

MIKE WHITE: Thank you, guys.

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