

Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Yolett

McPhee-McCuin

Women's Media Day Press Conference



the weak. They take no mercy on you. I don't remember anybody feeling bad by beating me by 60 and 50 points when I first started.

It gives me great pride now that our program is where it is. We're looking forward to continue to grow.

As far as personally, just growing spiritually. Sometimes you got to get knocked down. I got knocked pretty good. Just leaning on my faith and my belief in Christ. Just running with it.

Q. You lose two key players, KK Deans and Madison Scott. You get nine newcomers to the team. You could go down the list with the players that you have. I wanted to ask, how do you replace them? What are your biggest expectations for the newcomers?

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: Yeah, at Ole Miss, we don't really replace, we kind of try to reload. We lost Shakira Austin. Everyone said, How do we replace her? The next year we go to the Sweet 16. Madison Scott, KK Deans, we graduated six players. They're all right now playing professionally.

Our focus was just reloading with what we felt like we needed. With the return of Sira Thienou still being on the team, Christeen Iwuala, we felt like we had two core starters and wanted to build around that.

With the help of my administration, we were able to put, I guess people say, the number two portal class in place. Just looking forward to see how we mesh.

Q. You mentioned Sira Thienou. What is the next step in her development?

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: Well, she's no longer a freshman. Freshmen don't even know how to practice (smiling). She knows how to practice. She walked in the conditioning test this year and passed it on the first try. Last year we had to drag her across the line.

There's a level of maturation you have after going through the gauntlet of the Southeastern Conference for a year.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium the head coach at Ole Miss, Yolett McPhee-McCuin.

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: All right. I think it's still morning, so good morning, everyone.

Cannot believe this is my eighth year. I was just saying that I'm one of the old heads in the league now. But I'm incredibly grateful to be a part of the Southeastern Conference. Every day I wake up, I'm excited to be the head coach at Ole Miss. Looking forward to another great season for our league and also for us in Oxford.

Pretty much going to just open it up for questions, and we can kind of just go from there.

Q. You just said year eight. From year one to year eight, how have you grown as a coach? What is your approach now?

YOLETT MCPHEE-MCCUIN: I want to say I meet a lot of cool people, but I'm fan-girling right now because I'm a fan of yours. I'm really humbled to be in your presence.

As far as I'm concerned, this journey has been a long one. It was funny that you asked that because on the way here from the airport, I was telling my players that are here, seeing the program where it is now, that I used to hate coming to SEC Media Day because they would put my name and then my record. My record would be 1-15, 0-16 in the beginning years. It was embarrassing. I would always say, Why don't they focus on this year, I'm undefeated.

I stand here with great pride saying I'm undefeated right now. But the journey has been one of ebbs and flows. On a serious note, it has grown me up. This league is not for

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Looking for her to just continue to develop. I think Sira has a chance to be one of the best players in the SEC when this is all said and done. Maybe not this year, but for her whole career. I'm really excited about her growth. Her body looks great. She's just experienced. That goes a long way.

Q. You said the SEC is not for the weak. What did those first couple years -- what did you learn about yourself to set yourself up for what's come after that?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Man, I would have to write a book. It took me to my knees plenty times, that's for certain.

The league is so full of talent. People were up in arms that the media picked us six. Then I looked at who they had ahead of us, and that is how good our league is. We had a team that finished ninth that lost in the Sweet 16 last year. You know what I'm saying? The league is just so talented, you pretty much have to be ready for a fight every single night.

For me, this group, it's all about figuring out how to sustain throughout the course of the season, the ups and the downs, just continuing to be competitive. If it's anything that is taught me, not to get too high or not to get too low. Just stay even-keeled.

Q. Your word of the year is "give" this year. What is the significance behind that message, and what are you telling your team so they can execute on that word of the year this season?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Usually I kind of let it manifest naturally. I did with this word this year. Last year was "joy," and I felt like we needed that. This year, as we look at the landscape of athletics right now, a lot of people alluded to the pros. That is not my opinion. While we want to be pro prep, these are still young people. They're students. They go to class. They cry. They learn. They have shortcomings. I'm here to mentor them.

This is not the pros. We have some aspects of it, and they receive a lot. So it just came to me, like, this year, the focus needs to be... I think real leaders give. Real leaders are servants. They have to want to give because they always receive. I don't think that the world is just set up for that. I don't want any student-athlete to leave Ole Miss thinking that they're just going to receive without giving.

So that word means, in the larger frame, as people, to embrace the attitude of giving, but also giving 100% in the classroom, giving their 100% on the court, giving to each other as they fight every day to accomplish one goal.

Q. What was the lure for McMahon of Ohio State to come to Oxford and play for you?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: That was probably one of my easiest recruiting experiences I've ever had. Very unusual. Got on the phone with her. I said, Listen, this can go one of two ways. You can either go somewhere else or you can come here and we can both do something special with each other.

I said, I think there's a benefit that both of us can have. If you don't want that, then this is not the place for you.

I think a month later, maybe two weeks later, she got on campus, walked around. She said, Coach, I'm coming. I mean, it was really that.

Actually she committed before she came on the visit. I said, No, you need to come see this first. I don't need you changing your mind.

She came, walked around maybe for five, six hours. Said, All classrooms look the same, just show me the gym and the weight room. That was it. If I can get every All-American to just come and treat me as such, I will be in for a good ride.

It was very seamless. She was looking for something different. She's a graduate of Ohio State. She has fulfilled her obligation there. I thought we were just a great match for each other.

Q. How are you looking to shape the next 50 years encapsulating the culture of Ole Miss with the new transfers?

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: You'll have to talk to Keith to see if I have another 50 in me (laughter).

I just try to live in the present, try to make our alums proud. We constantly have them come on campus. I don't take for granted the fact that I have full access to Carol Ross and Van Chancellor. They hit me all the time. Peggie Gillom is there. Armintie Price Herrington. I have an alum on my staff, several.

For me, I just want to make the people that laid the foundation years before I even came to Ole Miss proud. Then I want to make the people that believed in me and gave me a chance proud.

There is not a day I don't wake up and I am not grateful to be the head coach at Ole Miss. This is just not something that I just do off the whim. I am a completely grateful and



proud. Every day I try to show that with joy when I come to work.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Yo, thank you for your time this morning.

YOLETT McPHEE-McCUIN: Thank you.

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