

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Lamont Paris

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium Lamont Paris, head coach at the University of South Carolina.

LAMONT PARIS: Good morning, everyone. Glad to be back here. It's an exciting time of year as we get started with just practicing, a new group.

As everyone knows, we're in different times. You got more new faces, I'm sure every team does, particularly in our conference, which had grown accustomed to not only a tremendous level of talent, but a lot of familiar faces.

Everybody's dealing with the same thing with a lot of new faces. Really those challenges are really exciting and one of the more exciting parts of this job, trying to get everybody on the same page, try to help these guys navigate things, some of them in just a one-year situation, a lot of them.

But it's fun. Glad to be back down here. The midpoint of the football season always kind of indicates that basketball is just knocking on the door. I talked with Mike White. They have an exhibition game tomorrow, so... It's here. It's crept up on us.

We'll be doing our thing Saturday against somebody else. Very excited to be back. An exciting group that we have. Much more experienced group than what we had. There are a lot of similarities in this year's group to the 2024 group that was referenced that made the NCAA tournament in terms of experience.

We'll have five guys that should or are at the thousand-point scoring mark for us. We added three 1,000-point scorers two years ago.

Versatility on the offensive end. We'll be able to spread the floor a little bit more than we were able to last year. Not an indictment on the group we had last year. Stylistically, we

will have people that are more accustomed to shooting from the perimeter that are bigger-than-average guys.

I'm ready to get this group playing. They're ready to play somebody else. They're tired of hearing my voice without playing someone else. The games can't get here quick enough. Really excited.

Q. You've been in the league for a few years now. Over your course in the league, how have you seen it grow in men's basketball? When you first accepted the job at South Carolina, what attracted you to the SEC?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, good question.

The league has grown tremendously, even since I've been in the league. This is actually the second time this has happened to me. When I went to the Southern Conference, the years following ended up being, in my opinion, arguably the best years of that league had experienced in terms of the overall level of talent in the league, in the teams, coaching and everything.

It's done it again. I think most would probably say that about the SEC men's basketball right now. There's something really exciting about that, just knowing what you get done is real. You're not going to accidentally beat teams in this league. You're not going to accidentally out-coach guys in this league. The things that you do, the successes that you have in this league, are the type that would be reproducible against any level of talent of basketball. There's something really exhilarating about that.

That was part of the draw of this opportunity for me, was just to play in a league that was such a talented league. The coaches in this league is, like I said, you're not going to go into the game and say, Here is how we're going to win this game, these three plays, not going to out X and O.

Columbia is a tremendous city, Columbia, South Carolina, and the people there are great. We don't have professional sports, so the things that we do at the university in terms of athletics reigns supreme throughout

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the state, and we get a lot of support because of that.

Yeah, those are the things that made it exciting.

Q. Myles Stute went through a lot this year. How did you see him mature, and what effect did that whole process have on him now that he's on the other side of it?

LAMONT PARIS: Yeah, that's a good question about Myles Stute.

In my years as a coach, the quality that has always led to tremendous performance, most times overachievement I would say, is the level of gratitude for the opportunity that is in front of a young man.

In 2025 it's getting harder and harder to generate that level of gratitude. It just is. Again, that's not an indictment on these guys, it just is.

You have a guy like Myles Stute who really had a hard time. You think about it, you're in your last year of eligibility, you have something like this happen. It had nothing to do with you put yourself in harm's way. It had nothing to do with anything that you did.

Myles was a trooper. His voice continued to be loud at practices. You understood what he was going through personally. You never saw that on his face. He was always -- and when I say "always," I mean always -- there for his teammates. What a great moment for me when I got to call him, I got to call him and tell him he was going to get the year back.

There have been a lot of criticisms over the NCAA over the years. That's for sure. But here was one decision that I knew they got right and I knew they got that right when I heard his voice when I told him.

Again, there's a level of gratitude that goes with what he's doing. He's very professional about how he goes about his business, in his craft.

He's as solid as the day is long. He's completely in control of his emotions, in a way that most young people just aren't. Really happy for him. Really excited about him, this new lease on his basketball life. He'll make the most of it. I don't doubt that.

Q. You plucked a freshman out of the state of Kentucky, EJ Walker. What attracted you to his game and what do you think he'll provide this season?

LAMONT PARIS: EJ Walker is an extremely intelligent

player. Then he's also an extremely intelligent basketball guy. There are some really smart people that they get on the basketball court, and basketball just doesn't make sense to them. He's very intelligent on the basketball court.

You don't have to tell him things multiple times very often. There's another thing that's a little bit different for young people. He absorbs things. He's looking for ways to put those into practice as we move from a film setting to a drill setting to a live five-on-five scenario. He's been really good about that.

He's a versatile guy. He can pass, make some plays off the dribble. He's a young guy. We have 15 guys on our roster. This is one of the deepest teams I've ever been a part of. I will say that right now.

What it looks like for any of these players, particularly our young guys, we're just focused on growth and getting better. He's been really committed to that. Tremendously hard-working young man.

I'll say this. This is also the hardest-working group I've ever been around, number one, in terms of just the hours, extra hours, that they spend in the gym, that are obvious hours. Maybe at 2:00 in the morning some of my other teams are in the gym and I never knew. Obviously these guys are putting a lot, a lot of time into the gym.

EJ and that whole freshmen class is a part of that. Tremendous young man. Got a good personality. He loves basketball. You think that would be something that goes with it, but not always. He really loves basketball. He wants to get better.

We're really excited about EJ.

Q. Meechie Johnson is a guy you know very well because you coached him two years ago. What went into the decision to bring him back onto the team after the -- some people call it a double Marfo or whatever you want to call it?

LAMONT PARIS: It's a once-in-a-lifetime situation probably, right, for this to happen.

I'll start off with, again, you want to talk about a level of appreciation that Myles Stute has for this opportunity, it's trumped only potentially by the level of appreciation that Meechie Johnson has for this opportunity. You can see it on a day-to-day basis in how they go about their business, the overall gratitude they have for this.

What went into the decision to bring Meechie back? There



really wasn't a decision. For me personally, there really wasn't a decision. As it looked like some things were happening, he goes into the portal officially, you start some conversations. I think you're both just trying to feel one another out.

It's like a dating relationship where there's been a breakup, then you start going back. Is this real? Are you really there? Am I really there? As you continue talking, you're getting to the bottom of what he wants out of this, what his expectations are, what we need out of this, what his expectations will be, there really wasn't much of a decision for me, honestly.

I said it when he left. I love the kid. I've known his family, his uncle, for an eternity. I'm from Ohio. It just really wasn't much of a decision at all for us.

As he gets here, we've talked about it as a staff, we can't imagine having brought a better piece into our team than Meechie Johnson. Some of that is basketball. Most of that doesn't really pertain to basketball. He speaks our language. He understands the things that we understand. He knows what the expectations are.

He's a leader, naturally. He's a leader. It's not forced. It's authentic.

To answer your question, alas, there was really no decision for us to bring Meechie back.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time this afternoon.

LAMONT PARIS: Thank you.

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