

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Nate Oats

Men's Media Day Press Conference



got depth. We do have skilled guys, two seven-footers that can play on the perimeter, make threes, handle the ball. Defensively our front court has to get a little bit better. We've been on them about it. Good to see what they do against another team on Thursday night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. How much have you seen the style of play change around you in this league since you've entered it? Do you take ownership for some of those changes to a more innovative offense?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I mean, it's definitely changed. I'm going into year six. Somebody told me I'm the second-longest tenured coach in the league, which is crazy. I'm going into year seven. Rick Barnes has been at Tennessee longer than I've been here.

I do think teams are trying to play a little faster. Probably spread out a little bit more. Take a few more threes. Some are, some aren't. It's been successful. We've won more SEC games than anybody in the league since we've been here.

I think sometimes when most of the league is playing a certain way, you come in and do it a lot different, it helps. You're kind of the aberration. The one that's playing a lot different. Now we're not. The only one playing that way, you see more teams shooting, some of the teams that have traditionally been -- some of slower teams in the country are even trying to play faster now. I think they see it's been a little more successful. Offensively we've led the country in scoring the last two years. A little bit easier to recruit to scoring sometimes.

I don't want to take credit for changing the league, but basketball's a copycat game in a sense. You look at the NBA, Warriors went to five out, also everybody starts playing five out because they won with it. You see Pacers are playing faster than anybody. The rest of the league is trying to play faster now. OKC.

You look at it, college basketball, teams try to copy what's been working. What we've done has worked in a sense

THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium Nate Oats, head coach at the University of Alabama.

NATE OATS: Good to be here again, annual appearance up here in Birmingham. We don't have to drive too far.

We're excited to get this thing going again. Feels like we've been going against each other, starting first week of June, you get eight weeks in the summer. We started class the middle of August. Been going for two months now. Kind of going against each other for about four months now. It's time. We're ready to play, get the exhibition with Florida State on Thursday. Our guys are ready to go against somebody else.

We're excited for the year. Obviously we lost a lot last year with Sears, First Team All-American, had three really good years for us. Just had a game winner for the Bucks a couple nights ago.

We not only lost him, we lost Cliff, Grant, lost multiple starters. Chris Youngblood is playing very well on the Thunder's team in the exhibitions. I think he's had 20 and 25 a couple nights.

We lost quite a bit. I think we've got good talent coming in. We had some guys that were out last year on a medical redshirt that have experience, Houston Mallette and Latrell Wrightsell, that I think really add something to the team. They're smart, they're tough, they play a lot of basketball.

You add Philon back, great freshman year, decided to come back after entering the draft. Holloway, I think he made a big jump from his freshman to sophomore year. First year with us was a sophomore year. I think he's going to make a bigger jump. He's looked really good here in practice.

Our back court, feel pretty confident in. Our front court, we



from year to year. We've been pretty good year to year. Only team in the country the last two years being the top five in offensive efficiency, too.

I think what we're doing works on offense with the right personnel. I will say some teams I've seen try to go a little bit more five out, fast, then it doesn't work. Maybe they don't have the right personnel, they revert back to what they're more comfortable with.

You have to have the right personnel to do it. I think with the right personnel, some teams have tried to do it and have been successful with it.

Q. You mentioned in the open that you want to see some more development with the front court defense. What have you seen with the back court defense? Could you speak to the depth on the bench that you're seeing.

NATE OATS: Yeah, so back court defense I think significantly improved. Going into the year, you probably would have said, and rightfully so, that Holloway would have been a weak link defensively, particularly in the back court.

I think his defense has significantly improved. He's doing a great job. He's getting up in the guys, pressuring the ball. He understands as a smaller guard, he's got to be a lot more of a pest. I think he's doing it. He's been good. He's put on weight, is stronger, more physical. He's always been super talented offensively. You got him playing a lot better.

Labaron has stepped up his game defensively. Wrightsell and Houston are both very smart, tough, competitive winners. Hard to be a winner if you're not playing both sides of the ball. Those two are playing both sides of the ball.

Two of our freshmen perimeter guys can be elite defenders. I think Davion Hannah is maybe as good of a perimeter defender as this program has seen since maybe Herb Jones. He's elite. He moves. He's 6'6", athletic, tough, can guard one through four. Amari Allen is right there with him. 6'7", competes, tough.

I think the depth, the athleticism, the toughness, all those guys are pushing each other. I think it makes our back court defense significantly improved, in my opinion.

The front court, they're coming. I thought today they had a really good day. Yesterday I thought they had a good day. We just got to get them to continue to improve and give us what they're capable of giving us.

Q. You've never shied away from tough non-conference schedules. Five ranked games, non-conference. What do you want your team to learn from those games? What do you anticipate throwing all those guys in new roles into the fire right away?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I mean, I'm not so sure that when we put this whole thing together I was thinking four of the first five, five of the first six, whatever it is, against top 25 teams, two of the top -- two of the first three are against top five teams. First week of the season we get St. John's on the road in the Garden. I think it's a cool experience for guys. Purdue is pre-season number one. Coming back to our place. Get them at home at least. Third game of the season.

All the way back to my high school games, back in Michigan, everybody made the state playoffs. What is the point of trying to go 20-0. There's no seeding back then either.

Get to the end of your 20 regular-season games, everybody starts brand-new. You draw out of a hat and play the state tournament. So to me the thing you're trying to do is be most prepared come March. To me, at this level, you should be the most prepared team come January for SEC play.

I don't think playing 13 cupcakes prepares you for SEC play. Whether we win or lose, I've never shied away from playing the best schedule in the country, we've had the number one strength of schedule for a number of years, had it last year, the year before, I believe. You play the best teams, you figure out where your weaknesses are, and you fix 'em immediately. You do it and you repeat it, you repeat it.

St. John's will expose one weakness, Purdue will expose another one, Illinois will expose another one, Gonzaga. You go through it. You keep going back to the drawing board and hopefully you're able to win some of these games if not all of 'em. We're going in trying to be competitive and win the games.

If you lose 'em and you get better... I'd much rather be whatever it is, 8-5, 9-4, 10-3 going into conference play than 13-0 and having no idea what your weaknesses are, where you got to get better, all that. All of a sudden you rattle off four or five straight losses in conference play. The sky's falling.

Let's figure out what we got to get better at in November and December and get better before we hit conference play in January.



Q. Obviously it's October. When you look to how close you have been to playing for a national championship, potentially winning the last two years, what do you think is the difference and that gap you need to close to pull that off?

NATE OATS: I think it's defense. Defensively we got to get better. We've known it. We've tried to focus on it. We're on it now.

Again, these last two years, only team in the country to play in a Final Four and Elite Eight both. Only team in the country to be in the top five in offensive efficiency. Defense, got to get back, the two years we were able to win the SEC regular season and tournament both, we were third in the country in defensive efficiency. We haven't been anywhere close to third these last two years. If we could get our defense back in the top 10, top five in the country, in defensive efficiency, I think that's the answer.

Until we get there, we're just going to keep pushing, keep holding guys accountable, keep showing it, coaching it. Think coach Brian Adams, our defensive coordinator, I hired him out of the NBA, he's done a great job. He's got a year in college now. Last year was his first year. I think he's much more aware. A lot of college offenses aren't what the NBA is running, so...

We got to get better. We're going to run an NBA offense, that's what we guard in practice, but we got to still guard heavy post-ups, heavy flex action, stuff they don't run in the NBA too much, run a lot in college.

Defensively if we can get our defense up to where it was those other two years, I think we got a shot.

Q. Back to the copycat thing, has that created a challenge in terms of trying to stay a step ahead when teams are hiring your coaches and recruiting your players? What has been the impact of the House settlement?

NATE OATS: So, the first one, more teams are trying to play... You look at some of the teams that have had success in this league that maybe weren't -- I thought Missouri was pretty good last year. Beat us pretty good at their place. Did what we try to do well, and they did it better than us. Ran us out of the gym at the start of that game, shot threes.

Yeah, different teams I don't even want to say they're copy us, they're just trying to play the way the game of basketball is going. That's the way basketball's going. They're trying to play more modern basketball.

We're trying to stay a step ahead of everybody. Keep studying it. With the assistants being able to get head jobs, super happy for all of them, it makes it a little harder with staff continuity, but it also gives you an opportunity to hire some fresh ideas in, if you will. We were able to hire Brian Adams from the NBA, in the NBA for 16 years. Runs our defense. I was able to hire Chris Fleming in. Chris was a front bench assistant for 10 years in the NBA, German national team head coach. He coached Dirk, Dennis Schroder, all the high-level German guys. Coached in Germany for a long time. He brings in fresh ideas. Was able to hire Preston Murphy. I think he's one of the best assistant coaches in the country.

We got the opportunity to hire in other really good coaches to bring new ideas and try to stay a step ahead of what everybody else is doing. We just got to work harder. We got to continue to progress. I got to continue to get better. I got to study it. I got to stay on it so we can try to stay a step ahead of what everybody else does.

The House settlement? Tell me what's rules are, we'll play by the rules, let's filling 'em out. They're changing every year. As long as I know what they are, I think the guys that complain about it don't figure out how to work within 'em. Just give us what the rules are. They're figuring out what they should be. Settlement got passed, but there's still a lot of stuff to figure out.

I think our administration does a great job filling our coaching staff in. I think the SEC, had multiple talks with Garth on different stuff. Just let me know what the rules are, we'll figure them out. I'm not going to complain about what they are. Let's figure it out.

I think it's great that our student-athletes are able to get compensated. There's a lot of money in college sports. They're the ones playing. They should be able to get a piece of the pie. Just tell us what the rules are. If we get everybody to follow the rules, you give us what the rules are, figure it out, put a team out there and compete.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time this afternoon.

NATE OATS: Thanks. Appreciate it.

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