

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Matt McMahon

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Matt McMahon, head coach at LSU, to the stage.

MATT McMAHON: Thank you. Really awesome to be here with you today. Really a great honor for me to introduce the three players I brought with me. Jalen Reed, 6'10", 240-pound redshirt junior now. I think he'll be one of the great stories in college basketball this season. Got off to a great start last year. Was instrumental in getting us started at 7-1. Suffered a devastating knee injury.

His journey and recovery, initially a 12-month recovery, he's about two months ahead of schedule. Been an inspiration watching how he's committed to the work to get back not only to the floor, but the growth from a mindset and leadership standpoint. I really think he'll have a monster year for us. Really proud to have an opportunity to coach him.

We also brought DJ Thomas with us, a transfer from UNLV. Elite point guard, very dynamic. Two-time All-Mountain West player. Freshman of the Year in that league, as well. Has really been a breath of fresh air from a coaching standpoint. Great basketball mind. Processes the game at a high level. Incredibly unselfish. Has a great court vision on the floor, ability to make the people around him better, which I think is always the most important trait of an elite point guard.

Marquel Sutton, 6'8", 230-pound forward. Under-recruited through the COVID years. Ended up playing junior college before joining Coach Crutchfield at Omaha, where he helped build an NCAA-tournament program there. Was the Summit Player of the Year last year. Averaged 19 points, eight rebounds a game. Versatile defender, can guard one through five. Plays with a relentless motor and energy. Contagious in our program.

It's a great honor to be joined by these three.

Love the construction of our roster. Like many teams in the country, we have 11 new players. I think we were able to be very intentional in how we built our roster. Obviously, this is the best league in college basketball, the most physical league in college basketball. We wanted to address that in our front court. We were able to do that with Jalen and Marquel and also the addition of Mike Nwoko from Mississippi State at 6'10", 250. Started off 32 games last year. Very well coached by Chris Jans there at Mississippi State.

Been surprised with the skill level around the basket. Been very good finisher with either hand. Very smart player. Expect him to make a huge impact.

A big key for us was the retention of Rob Miller. Freshman last year. One of the youngest players in all of college basketball. Someone I expect to have a breakout season this year on the national stage. Had four double-figure games last year down the stretch in SEC play. Highlighted by his 19-point 10-rebound game against the national champion Florida team.

Really excited with how we've built our team. Very proud of the buy-in from our players and coaching staff to creating a high-performing culture and upholding the standards and accountability we know will be required to compete in the SEC this season.

With all that said, happy to take any questions. Thank you.

Q. What's the few qualities you look for in the people that you bring into your program, transfers?

MATT McMAHON: I think that's a great question. What you're trying to figure out in the portal, long answer, I think it starts with the character piece. Do those players impact winning? Do they want to come in and be coachable and learn and keep growing on their journey?

I think you look at the SEC, that's one of the many reasons for the success of the league last year. Seven of the 13 players that were drafted into the NBA all started at non-Power Four leagues before they got there, whether it



was Johni Broome at Morehead State, Will Richard at Belmont, and on down the line.

So trying to determine what's going to translate to success in the best league in the country. Some of the common themes have been positional size, the ability to shoot the ball from behind the three-point line, rebounding and toughness. Trying to identify those and how we put our roster together this spring was really critical for us.

Q. Offensively speaking, what do you want your team to excel at?

MATT McMAHON: I think you'll see a mix from us. Like any elite football team, it starts at the quarterback position. I believe it starts at point guard for us. DJ Thomas has been fantastic there. I think he's a wizard with the ball. Can not only create for his teammates but shoots it well for three. That's another area in the portal, we look at catch-and-shoot three-point percentage versus overall three-point percentage because we don't shoot a lot off the dribble from behind the three. He's a guy that was 44% a year ago at UNLV.

I think you see his electricity with the basketball.

Then in the front court, you got to have size and physicality in this league or you have no chance. I mean, no chance at all. We really wanted to address that, be able to have a power game. Not per se just post-ups, but lob threats at the rim, offensive rebounding presence here in the best offensive rebounding league in the country.

Then on the perimeter for us at the wing position, we try to be very intentional in getting good size, shot the ball well from three, and would be very solid on the defensive end.

That's how our roster's constructed, and that's how our offensive system will be built around that.

Q. Not counting your freshmen here, the guys coming back, guys coming in, right now we're looking at 116.8 points per game. There's not enough basketballs to share. How are you going to strive to orchestrate your offense to where these guys that can really score the ball are having great chemistry with each other and figuring the flow of that out? Is that something in season you're trying to figure out or you'll be pretty confident going into the season?

MATT McMAHON: I think we've tried to be very intentional from day one there. Starting with the 116 points a game you talked about, we wanted to get a lot of older and more experienced, especially here in this league. Last year we were way too young at a lot of key positions. We had two

players celebrate their 23rd and 24th birthdays this past week. Thought that was going to be really important for us.

I think it's similar to the previous question, it's the construction of the offensive system, how we use our point guards with DJ and Jalen Reece, who is going to be an outstanding freshman point guard for us. The three-point shooting at the wing position. Then the front court, the size and physicality there.

I think one of the challenges for some of the guys making the move when they move up in league, we have three guys who were their leading scorer, the number one option every trip down the floor. Now I think how quickly we can help them with that adjustment to finding their spots.

It all starts with getting the right people. All three, very unselfish. Chose LSU because they want to be a part of impacting winning. It's been fun to watch. It will be a work in progress certainly here as we get started in November.

Q. For fans that may have expected a coaching change after missing the tournament the past few years, what would you tell them on why you should still be leading this team?

MATT McMAHON: I think it's a new season for us. Clearly we didn't capitalize on the season we had two years ago when we won nine SEC games and finished seventh in the league. Felt we had the momentum moving in the right direction. Following Jalen Reed's injury last year, we weren't able to capitalize, had a very disappointing SEC season.

As I look to the future of our program, there's great excitement in the roster we've been able to build. There's great chemistry and energy amongst our group. The only two returners, number one is Jalen Reed, who should have all the confidence in the world coming into the season. As I mentioned, he started 7-1 with the team last year. Three of those were Power Four wins. Last Power Four win he had 21 points and 31 rebounds. Really praised him for the work he's put in to get back.

The other returner we wanted to retain, Rob Miller, 6'10", 235 pounds, 7'5" wingspan. I mentioned the 19-point, 10-rebound game he had last year. Expect him to have a breakout season. We've addressed the areas that need to be addressed in roster construction so that we can match up and compete here in the best league in the country.

Q. On defense, who is the perimeter stopper? What does the wing stopper position look like?

MATT McMAHON: I think we have a lot of versatile



defenders there, and our defensive system will reflect that and the things we do on that end of the floor.

I mentioned Marquel, the guy can guard one through five, graded out as an elite defender.

I'll give credit to DJ, probably been the pleasant surprise there. Praised all the offensive side in the beginning. But he's been an elite defender, really disruptive. He's worked extremely hard in the weight room. When you can have a disruptive point guard at the front of your defense, it allows you to do some other things.

Then in this league you have to have the size and physicality in the front court, not only to defend the painted area, but this is the best rebounding league in the country. If you're undersized, you have no chance of rebounding at the level that this league requires.

Really excited about how the roster's constructed, not only versatility on the offensive side, but also defensively and on the glass.

Q. What was the genesis of the neutral site games on your schedule?

MATT McMAHON: I think the opportunity to play great teams, Quad 1 games, on neutral floor. Texas Tech, a pre-season top-10 team, getting an opportunity to play them in Fort Worth is a great opportunity for our program.

Then the following week to have SMU, another team that projects as an NCAA tournament-level team. To get to play them in the Pelican's arena in New Orleans in a doubleheader with Coach Mulkey and our elite women's program is a great opportunity for us.

Two Quad 1 games on a neutral floor, in addition to you know with your SEC schedule you're going to get plenty of Quad 1 games. That was the reason for those.

I think both are close for us. Fort Worth is an easy trip from Baton Rouge, then New Orleans just an hour down the road.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

MATT McMAHON: Thanks so much.

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