

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Texas A&M Aggies

Coach Bucky McMillan

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Bucky McMillan from Texas A&M at the podium.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Thank y'all. It's good to be back in Birmingham for a second. I was telling this to Garth, I lived up here on Peacock Lane, which is like a mile from here. I would walk to elementary school with a basketball in my hand about every single day. Mountain Brook Elementary is half a mile from here. I would walk right by this spot with a basketball.

Coming back here and being a part of SEC media days, seeing a lot of familiar faces is great. I appreciate all the local people who showed up. I see some of y'all, Kevin here today, been covering us for years. The people from Texas A&M, thank you very much. National media, obviously. It means a great deal to us for covering us.

I hear there's not as many athletic directors in the house today or yesterday because we're in the middle of football season and our football program is rolling right now, top five team in the country. But by God, we got Trev Alberts, our AD, here. And we appreciate it. So who says Texas A&M ain't a football and a basketball school? Thanks for being here today, man (smiling).

Look, I was joking with someone a second ago, when I saw John Calipari take the Arkansas job, he said, look, we just got hired, I met with the team, and there is no team. I laughed at that. And then they say be careful what you wish for, they always said be careful what you laugh at. I get hired in April. It was a weird set of circumstances with the House settlement coming on, a lot of players getting in the portal, players taking advantage of the opportunities out there. Coaching turnover mid April. Last Power Five job opened. Didn't have anybody on the roster yet.

I totally felt John Calipari's pain. I can tell you this, we're not a finished product, but we're a heck of a lot better than

we were in April with nobody on the roster.

I think our staff did as good a job as possible of putting together a team that I think can compete in this league. If you can compete in this league, it means you can get to the NCAA tournament. If you are in the NCAA tournament, you're playing for a national championship. We all know what this league is. It was the best league in the history of college basketball last year. Predicted to be the best league in the country this year.

I think certain universities are going to have to choose what we want to be good at. I think Texas A&M can be good at everything. I think we have the right leadership, the resources. We can be good at everything.

I think Texas A&M and my goal, everywhere I've been, whether high school or college, we wanted to get to the top of the league. We did that at a place in high school that certainly had not been to the top of the championship that they played for in the Southern Conference. Samford, we did the same thing, now we're in the SEC.

Obviously not just be happy to be here but get to the top of this league. If you can get to the top of this league, you can be a national champion. I think Texas A&M is a sleeping giant. I think you can win a national championship at Texas A&M. I've been elated to be there thus far.

For our team this year, I'm so thankful for the players who joined our roster in April and May because they had to see it before it's happened, before we won a game there. They had to see it. Some of them had to jump on board before we had other players on the roster. We had some very good players jump on board not knowing who they were going to play with because they believed in the staff and the university. I'm elated with the roster we put together based on the circumstances.

I think we have a really good shooting team. We have to come a long way on defense. They always say get old, get deep, get some continuity. Don't have much continuity when you don't have players returning. We are old, deep, will play a style of basketball that will be entertaining for the



fans and hopefully hard to play against.

That's our team this year. Y'all can ask me about specific players. But very excited to be here. Very excited as we go through this year to get to the top of this league.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Since you have put the team together, you've had an opportunity to practice. What specifically gives you optimism that you are going to be able to come together and be the kind of team you're talking about?

BUCKY McMILLAN: A couple things. First of all, I would say our age. They're mature players. We're not totally healthy right now with Mackenzie. When we have everybody, we have a deep team. You have an old team that's deep, okay? When you have old players that are mature, this isn't their first rodeo with college basketball.

You're going to hear every kind of coach speak this week, we've all heard it, we all know it. The truth is to compete at this level, the talent gaps can be big or they can be slight. But to have a successful season, you're going to have to have a team that has maturity to fight through the adversity of the season, the highs, the lows. You'll see some teams that go on a four-game losing streak, they tank the season because they weren't ready for the hard.

I think our players have been a part of college basketball and know that it's not easy. It's not easy to go on a two- or three-game road streak in all of college basketball. It dang sure is not easy in this league.

For our players, we have experienced play in college basketball. Many of them had experience at the Power Five level.

Q. Why was it important for you to take some of your key staff members with you to Texas A&M?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Well, I think we've had a great staff, wherever I've coached. I mean, definitely a 'we'. There's familiarity with each other and continuity with how we operate.

In addition to taking the staff members that I've known a long time, like Mitch Cole actually coached me in college, we added some great staff members as well that knew Texas A&M.

What's unique about our staff is you can say y'all are kind of new there, but Mitch Cole coached at Texas A&M and won an SEC championship there as an assistant coach. Kyle Keller did the same thing. Darby Rich has coached

there and Frank Haith coached there. And Darby Rich is, in my opinion, maybe the best strength coach in all of college basketball. Then you're looking at three other coaches who have been head coaches and have won championships and recruited at a very, very high level.

Texas A&M is a unique place in that the people there, I say Aggies support Aggies. Those that we brought with us were Aggies at one point. Once you're an Aggie, you're always an Aggie.

That staff was able to quickly tap into the fan base at Texas A&M. We needed that in a short order because this day and age of college basketball, things move quick. We needed to rally the fan base very quickly to help us build a roster.

Q. You mentioned your background and growing up here. At what point did you really start to feel like you could get an opportunity to coach at this level? What made now the right time to make that jump?

BUCKY McMILLAN: What made it the right time now? We have a great administration. I've worked for a tremendous person when I was at Mountain Brook High School, an athletic director named Terry Cooper who I actually played for there. So I knew him, believed in him. I honestly felt at that time I was the best person for that job.

I knew Martin Newton at Samford. When I went to Samford, I felt like I was the right person for that job.

I talked to Trev Alberts and his vision for what he wanted at Texas A&M, I felt I fit that job, and that job fit me, right?

You're talking about when did I know? You don't know how that works. Like, you don't know where am I going to end up. There's no difference. I can tell you this, when I was at Samford, we were playing Kansas in the NCAA tournament, two minutes left to go in the game, I'm coaching a JV basketball game, two minutes left in the game, as a coach and competitor, you don't note the difference. You are where you are, right?

What I can say is we had a lot of college coaches to come and recruit some of my players in high school. I got to see every angle. That experience is probably better than any experience I've had as a college coach. I had a McDonald's All-American on my team. I got to see every school in the country recruit that player. What worked, what didn't work. That helped me tremendously understanding the recruiting game. Though I hadn't recruited before I got to Samford, I got to see every coach in the country recruit my guys.



Once we kind of figured that out, I know how this recruiting works, the basketball stuff and the connecting piece, that's something I'm very comfortable doing. I've done it my whole life.

Q. It looks like the better teams that you had at Samford, in particular, play fast, shoot and make a lot of threes. You were able to generate a lot of rim pressure on the offensive glass. Do you go about constructing a roster that can replicate that in the SEC?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Yeah, look, when we had to construct our roster, we had to take the best what was out there. So we knew, I've told this to different people, we're not going to win an Oscar opening night, right? You have to put the actors together that fit it perfectly to do that on opening night.

We had to put together a roster that had good people and had talent. We'll have to play smaller in spots this year. Some guys out of position. But we know that when you look at the Final Four, those rosters all have one thing in common. Is it that they play zone? Is it that they play man? Is it that they press? Shoot a lot of threes? One thing in common, they got talent.

So for us, we just had to put a roster together that had talent, and we said we'll figure it out once we get that talent, as long as they are the right people and they fit Texas A&M.

To your question about rim protection, I'd be the first to tell you, we may have lineups out there where we don't have anybody taller than 6'5". That can be challenging. We better steal the ball before they shoot. We may have times out there we put two 7-footers out there. We have to figure it out as we go.

Q. You've been able to be from the state of Alabama, get a north Alabama kid in Jacari Lane. How has he been able to transition into your team?

BUCKY McMILLAN: Jacari has been great. Every intangible you can have in a player, Jacari has. He really does. You can't put a price tag on that. For these players coming up from mid-major, the difference in -- like we talk about in talent is that. But he's a winner. He's won everywhere he's been. He's won at places that hadn't won yet.

There's things he'll do on a stat sheet that will be great. But more importantly, the intangibles he has -- moving the basketball, being about winning every day, so happy to be at Texas A&M, not taking it for granted -- that's the type of

player I can ride with. He's going to be a big part of our success this year.

Q. You talked about taking your basketball back here when you were a kid. What's this experience like to have grown up here, started your career, then to come here now as an SEC basketball coach? Is it emotional or nostalgic or just another day in a coach's life?

BUCKY McMILLAN: I saw a lot of familiar faces when I came here, people stopped by to say hey. You've heard the saying it takes a village to raise a child. This village raised me. I wouldn't be here without the people of this village. We did a lot of great things together. We're about to do a lot of great things at Texas A&M.

There's a lot of people I'm meeting out there. It was special when we did it here because we did it all together. At Texas A&M it's going to be even more special because there's a lot more people that are going to have to come together to do it. I'm looking forward to making it happen.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time this afternoon.

BUCKY McMILLAN: Thank y'all. Appreciate it.

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