

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Oklahoma Sooners

**Coach Jennie Baranczyk**

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Jennie Baranczyk from Oklahoma to the stage.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: If you have a question...

**Q. Give us some of your favorite memories and maybe not so favorite memories of your first trip through the SEC last year.**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, honestly, a year ago as you're standing here, everyone says, Compare the Big 12 and the SEC. I said, Ask me in February because we have no idea. Ask me in January, I hated it, right?

But honestly, I think it's as good as advertised. A lot of people say it just means more. I know that sounds really cliché. But after living it a year, this league is impressive, it really is. From the environment, importance of sport, student-athletes. Every night you're playing against future pros and Olympians, you're facing these great college coaches, facing these great environments on a massive level.

I think there's probably not one memory that was so great. I think the SEC tournament was obviously great, as well. But what a way to learn, what a way to get smacked in your face, fall down, get up and keep going.

I'm proud of the way we finished especially last year. But experience is our best teacher and we got a lot of great experiences.

**Q. How reassuring is it to have Raegan back for another season?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I mean, obviously it's really nice to have Raegan Beers. She's an incredible leader. She's

grown so much. Her game has grown. Her confidence in herself has grown. Her presence has grown.

I'm really excited about our team. I think we have a lot of experience back. We mix experience with a lot of new. It's made for a fun summer, a fun fall so far, and I'm excited for the season.

**Q. You talk about that experience that you're bringing back. Payton Verhulst had a strong performance in the SEC tournament, in the NCAA tournament. How valuable is it to have her back?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Payton, she's so good. She really is. She doesn't even know how good she is. I think being able to navigate the Big 12 the way that she did, I thought she did a great job. To be able to come into the SEC and really learn it, learn herself, her game, really lead our team. I think she just does a phenomenal job of doing things that you don't always get to see.

Her off-ball movement is really good. Her basketball IQ is really good. Her intangibles as a leader are really good. It was fun to be able to watch her continue to grow.

I also think it really sparked something in her this off-season. She's really elevated her level of leadership in everyday competitiveness probably because of the season last year.

**Q. What are some of the tangible things you like to see from your team this year that you didn't see last year?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: You mean like take care of the ball? That would probably be number one (smiling).

Honestly, I think that you can see we're getting better and we play together as a team. That comes out in the assist column. I think we do a good job of being able to share the ball. I think we set each other up really well. Those are things that we've got to continue to do.

We're going to be tested in our non-conference before we get to conference, but we really have to learn each other.



Then obviously defensively, we have to be able to guard better in terms of one-on-one defense because this league is so elite. There are some elite players in this league. That's something that we've really worked a lot on.

**Q. How would you describe your first SEC tournament experience?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Again, I think it was a great experience. I thought Greenville was great. I thought there were a lot of fans. I think we have educated fans. We have good basketball fans where women's basketball matters in this league. Honestly, we want to bring more people from Oklahoma. But our fan base is incredible.

I thought from an environment standpoint, you want to come, you want to come. You see these high-level players. When you start to look at I think it was the Final Four of the tournament were top 10 teams. We haven't experienced that yet. I know that's something that the SEC experienced, but we haven't. For us to experience that kind of level and that kind of intensity, it was an NCAA tournament. That's something that was I thought really impressive.

Yet it's really family-friendly. There are people that can sit on the sidelines, give high fives to our teams. The teams are accessible. I can't rave about the environment enough. I hope people just continue to come.

**Q. I know you said you wanted us to ask you like January or February how you felt about the SEC. Was there any moment where you felt not necessarily comfortable but you felt like you had things --**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: No, I have not ever felt comfortable. What do you mean (laughter)?

I don't mean to interrupt and I'm kind of joking with you. But this is a league you don't get to feel comfortable. I love that. That's why you compete, you're part of this league. You're playing against such incredible talent.

Do I think we got a little bit better as time went on? Yes. We fell on our face. There are a lot of times we just fell on our face. But we never quit. We just kept going and kept saying we have to get better.

Again, every night provides a different challenge. You're never comfortable, but that's a really good thing. You never want to be comfortable, especially in this sport and in this league. You just can't ever be.

I say that not in terms of it's awful, I say that in terms of it's

the highest compliment. You don't ever get to be complacent, comfortable. You just got to keep going.

**Q. How do you plan to weave in Aaliyah Chavez?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: She's going to weave in herself. She's such a great team player. She really has picked up on a lot of things from a point guard standpoint. Our team loves her. She fits in really well. She has great court vision.

She's going to have to continue to learn the level, right? Nobody comes in game-ready, but she comes in practice-ready. She comes in hungry and she works really, really hard. It's not going to take a lot for her to weave in.

**Q. What clicked in for you in February when you hit your stride?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, again, what's challenging is as coaches you never feel like, oh, something just clicked all of a sudden. It was literally this team trying to continue to get better and grow.

We had a hard January, obviously. You're playing on the road in intense environments. We didn't show up in some. We got scared in some. We had to learn, Okay, you're either going to get better or this is just going to continue to happen because there's not an off night.

We just started to chip away, started to get better. I thought we did a better job of growing in that instead of separating. You could see our movement got better. You could see our play got better. But I don't think there was one defining moment. We just didn't give up. You can't just give up when things don't go well. I think that was a true testament to the team to be able to do that.

There was no magical moment. There were a lot of hard moments. We had to make some decisions.

**Q. Talk about your non-conference schedule and how that will prepare you for the SEC.**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I mean, we have some great non-conference opponents. Obviously we open up with Belmont, who is a perennial NCAA tournament team and has a unique style that you have to be ready for. Our second game is against UCLA.

One of the things that we talk about, and you can look at the rest of our schedule, our ACC matchup in NC State is going to be so good. We have our series with Oklahoma State back. We didn't have that a year ago. That's going to be great, too.

Again, you can go up and down the line of teams that we'll get to play. One thing that we will always do is to be able to really try to test ourselves early with different styles of play, with talented play, with really good teams.

You have to see where you're at. If you fall down, you get up. You're going to fall down. We want to be able to learn a lot about ourselves that maybe we're a little bit more prepared as we enter January and into the SEC.

**Q. What did your team take from the Sweet 16 appearance?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Well, I think obviously it was exciting to get there. We felt like there were some things that we did really well, then there were some things in that second half that we didn't.

What we've taken I think every year in the off-season is that we have to get better. We take that really personally. Each one of our players.

The spring was hard. You talk to any coach in the country, and the spring was hard. There were a lot of decisions that each player had to make. So for the women in our locker room to make the decisions that they did, then to say, We're going to work harder, look in the mirror, go after something that's bigger than us because we want to continue to get better.

Not that you ever want to lose, 'cause you don't, and you definitely don't want to lose the way we did. But to go against teams we got to see. I mean, we played a lot of Final Four teams obviously, two in our league. We have to get better.

We've seen what some of those teams have done. We felt what some of those teams have done. Now we have to get better. Got a long way to go. We have to continue to inch in the right direction. I think that's what those lessons teach you. It teaches you in the SEC tournament, it teaches you in the NCAA tournament.

**Q. For all of the ups and downs last year, you did finish tied for fourth in the league.**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Sorry, I just can't...

**Q. You're emphasizing what you need to do to get better, as coaches do, right?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Yes.

**Q. But you also were picked fifth this year. Do you**

**feel you earned a measure of respect for your program in your first year in the league?**

JENNIE BARANCZYK: I don't know if I've ever really worried about whether or not people respect us. I just don't think that's something that motivates us. You can't allow people to -- you to feel good when people praise you or you to feel bad when people don't pick you.

To me, it's irrelevant. It's what our team is going to do every day and what we do on game days. That's something that has been more of our motivation. I think that's always been motivation for our program because I don't think that we ever worry about that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

JENNIE BARANCZYK: Thank you all. Appreciate you.

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