

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

**Missouri Tigers**

**Coach Dennis Gates**

Men's Media Day Press Conference



**the turnaround last year. Can you talk about some of the keys to go from no SEC wins to pushing towards the top of the league.**

THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium Dennis Gates from the University of Missouri.

DENNIS GATES: I appreciate everybody that's here. Obviously thanks to our commissioner, Commissioner Sankey, our associate commissioner, Garth Glissman. What you guys continue to do for men's basketball is sometimes overlooked, but I want to say thank you to both of you guys.

For me, it's an honor to represent our program, our institution, the city of CoMo, obviously the SEC Conference. Having a team to be a part of a historic run last year was great. It was a great accomplishment, to say the least.

Obviously, like any team that I coach, I pour into friendship, love, accountability, trust, discipline, unselfishness, enthusiasm, and toughness to each of my guys. That's what I expect them to pour into each other.

We have a great staff. I'm excited about our growth since June 1st, where we obviously put everybody on the same page in assimilation. At this point we're in our fight-and-focus mode. I'm thankful for the group. They have done a tremendous job. Our locker room is exciting. Our players are exciting. We have a mix of powerful vets, but also a group of returning guys that have done nothing but put their arms around all our newcomers.

We have two freshmen that's obviously trying to find their way, but they're doing a tremendous job, to say the least.

I'm thankful to be here. I'm excited about our culture, our staff, and the buy-in is there.

THE MODERATOR: If you have any questions...

**Q. Culture obviously had to have been a big part of**

DENNIS GATES: Absolutely. When I look back on my career, that's a great question. I was able to be at two different programs, one for Ricardo Patton, the other for Dave Carter, on the first day of building the program.

In addition to that, I learned from probably the best architect of building college basketball programs, and that's Leonard Hamilton. Obviously what he's done as an assistant at the University of Kentucky, what he's done at Oklahoma State, what he's done at Miami, what he's done at Florida State, I was able to learn in transparency through his failures, not the trophies, rings, nets that were being cut down. I knew whatever job I would get I would have to build it.

What we've done at Cleveland State wasn't a shock to me, wasn't a shock to Coach Ham. All I did was reset the program as if it was year one. Our players bought in. We recruited the right players. In this climate of the portal, you're able to do certain things.

What we were able to attract, like a Mark Mitchell who transferred from Duke University, to a program that was 0-18, that speaks for the culture, that speaks for the institution. Obviously it speaks for me. He came and wanted to play for me. I appreciate a young man that does that.

I appreciate Tamar Bates, Caleb Grill, those guys who endured the storm, but in addition to that the guys that held on to the rope. They did a tremendous job last season. The year was a great success.

**Q. You mentioned Mark Mitchell. Got voted to Second Team All-SEC. What are your expectations for him going into his senior year?**

DENNIS GATES: My expectations is that Mark Mitchell will become more of an aggressive player. We all saw a shell of him. I think Texas A&M game at home, I benched him for the last 10 minutes because I didn't like his

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aggressiveness. Then he came out and probably displayed the aggressiveness that I thought he should and he thought. He went on an unbelievable run from that moment.

A, Mark Mitchell is a coachable guy, right? He allowed me to do that. Didn't fuss, didn't fight. He delivered on the call what was needed. He answered to his teammates. He's a guy that can play one through five. He can defend one through five.

I want to see Mark Mitchell rebound a little bit more from an analytical standpoint because I do think that will help his future in basketball.

The other thing is continue to be the unselfish spirit, the great leader that I think he can be on and off the court.

**Q. When you go from 138th in offensive efficiency to eighth last year, is that just personnel? Is that scheme?**

DENNIS GATES: The scheme, and I would love to credit myself. I have a great staff. Our guys do a tremendous job. If you look at year one, we were pedaling around top 20, top 30 in that area. I think the adjustment, when you lose a Caleb Grill, your offensive efficiency is going to go down. John Tonje was hurt, as well. Your offensive efficiency is going to go down.

What I'm looking at is how our guys were able to galvanize our system and do it repeatedly regardless of what was in front of them in whatever environment. We had some great wins, three of 'em against top five opponents. Our SEC Conference, our SEC schedule, is bar none the best in the country. I just think we work on it every single day as a part of my DNA, a part of the system that I built, that I've created, and a style that I always have wanted to play.

It resembles much of my high school days with my high school coach, George Stanton. He was a longtime assistant for Bob Hambric at Simeon High School. He coached Ben Wilson during that time when he was a freshman and sophomore. He took over a program at Whitney Young High School. That's the system offensively that he allowed me to play in, which in turn is a part of who I am as a person.

**Q. A lot of coaches talk about wanting player-led cultures. What is the connection between getting that and having the amount of retention that you do?**

DENNIS GATES: Well, then I'm giving out my secrets during this transfer portal era. I can't give it all out (smiling).

But I have a great relationship with my guys. You guys are able to see it up close just when it comes down to the genuineness of it. It's authentic, it's real. It is not one-sided where I'm patting them on the back. I coach my guys hard. It's one of those things where I would say it's met with relationships, it's built off relationships.

The most important thing that we do on June 1st when everybody moves on campus is our team building with Dr. Joe Carr, our sports psychologist, a guy that's been in my life, a mentor that's been in my life since I was 18 years old.

We work on it every day. It's important to me that I meet the guys on their turf, whether it's on campus, walking around, or even figuring out a little bit more about them beyond basketball. They sit in my office from time to time. Most of the time I know they're coming back so I don't have to inundate them with basketball jargon or anything else. They want to naturally be around each other, and they want to be around our staff.

I think our staff, we have a management style that allows us to protect our culture, but also we have a recruiting style that attracts young men that want to be a part of the program and want to be coached by myself and also the staff.

I'm thankful for that. I'm thankful for the guys that play for us. It's lifelong relationships.

**Q. Have you seen a player improve so dramatically with his shooting double-digit percentage, Anthony Robinson II?**

DENNIS GATES: We had a young man named Kobe Brown who I would say he was a 20-plus, probably 25% three-point shooter with only 30 attempts on a year. We in one year got him to a hundred-plus attempts. He shot 40-plus percent. The same with Sean East, a young man that was able to get his percentages high.

We do a great job in our player development. Ant Robinson and any other young man that wants to play for us is part of our recruiting pitch. Those numbers that you see in improvement in shooting is something I've done early in my career as player development for the Los Angeles Clippers. It was my first job out of college.

But, so to speak, it's important. Recruiting is important, but also getting kids better. They can see it visually. Their parents can see it. Their support system.

Ant Robinson is a product of that. I'm looking forward to



the other jump that he makes this year.

**Q. You mentioned the top five wins last year. What do those wins do for the program in terms of showing what's possible at Missouri?**

DENNIS GATES: Hopefully it helps me keep my job, you know, things like that. I think that's important.

But what it does is it builds memories. It allows you to know who you are when you put yourself in front of other teams, recruiting, the evaluation of an Ant Robinson or Tamar Bates. It lets you know you're doing things in the right way, not only in the recruiting process, but when the kids get on campus.

We roll our sleeves up and all hands on deck approach from our trainer, strength and conditioning, academic advisors, all the way to our president and board of curators. I think the city of Columbia has an unbelievable tradition in itself. That's what allows us to do what we do. We share that nationally.

I think when you are able to play in the SEC Conference on the platform that they provide both in a pregame, postgame show standpoint, you look at those that are narrating the shows, you look at what our commissioner has done, and obviously what Garth Glissman has done, they don't get enough credit.

Us coaches can get the credit, the players can get the credit. I would easily put those guys right there, produce a poster and put 'SEC Basketball' with their two faces on there, as well, because they're part of it. They're part of what they've accomplished, what we've accomplished on our campuses.

**Q. You return the second-most minutes in the SEC this year. What made retention such a priority?**

DENNIS GATES: What made it a priority is that's the fabric I'm cut from, right? Traditionally if you look at the teams that we had at Florida State when I was an assistant, but also at Cleveland State, we did it with some matriculation within our program, whether it's juniors becoming seniors or sophomores becoming seniors or freshmen becoming seniors. That retention factor, you have to protect it.

When you look at the national championship, they had about -- each team I want to say probably had a good portion, at least three starters, returning to give them a chance to move on and move forward in their season.

For me personally, it's the culture that's being able to be

transferred into one player, into the newcomers. I want to be able to make sure we have portal kids, but also high school recruiting is still going to be important to me regardless of what's going on around us.

I just want to make sure those portal kids are like a Jacob Crews with two years left, a Mark Mitchell with two years left, Tamar Bates, and a Caleb Grill. We have to make sure we have guys that are not just one year and they are out. We got to be able to do that in this conference because ultimately that's what wins, I believe.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time.

DENNIS GATES: Thank you. M-I-Z.

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