

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

SMU Mustangs

Coach Toyelle Wilson

T.K. Pitts

Chantae Embry

Women's Press Conference



did that change, whether it was recruiting or other ways that you approached elevating your program?

TOYELLE WILSON: Well, the runway was really short because we found out I think May or June -- or May, and we learned it was official in June -- or July 1st. Our recruiting definitely changed. We had to get in the portal and really get kids that had that experience, that can score the ball. I think there's nothing to substitute for experience.

We wanted to get that first to get and get good kids that could compete at that level. It was really important to us. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, we had the facilities, we have the academics. People get to now kind of not just locally but now globally, nationally getting to know who SMU is. We wanted to get that vibe out of there. I think the social media had to kind of grow. Just getting them informed on the East Coast about SMU.

It was really important for us to do that, and it's just been going so well. People that we didn't have a shot at before, now we have opportunities to have and talk to. So we're just riding this wave and now getting the players in here that we can compete at this level.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously Texas is a huge hotbed for women's basketball.

TOYELLE WILSON: Sure.

THE MODERATOR: How has that helped now that you can recruit players from your state to say, hey, we can play in the best women's basketball league?

TOYELLE WILSON: It's a time right now. We have a Life After Ball program that prepares student-athletes for life after they're done playing basketball. Our academics are basically Ivy League. That was really attractive to the ACC with the likes of Dukes and the North Carolinas and that academic level of integrity.

I think also our facilities. But now to put the icing on the cake and now to have ACC to do something different, you

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to SMU to the ACC.

TOYELLE WILSON: Yes, we're really excited. Thank you so much.

THE MODERATOR: We have with us on the stage head coach Toyelle Wilson, entering her 14th season, T.K. Pitts, and Chantae Embry. Welcome.

First thing, I think you're going to have a brand new bunch of fans watching your team for the first time. Give us a little preview of what we should expect from this team this season?

TOYELLE WILSON: Just really fast-paced basketball, hard-nosed toughness, grittiness. Just an exciting game of basketball. Scoring the ball. But something that's actually going to be entertaining on the floor that will give the fans something to cheer about.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, when you heard we're going to the ACC, what was your first thought?

PLAYER N: I'm, like, let's go. It's just an exciting feeling getting to this high level of play with an amazing conference. Yeah, that was just in my mind, let's go, we ready.

PLAYER M: Yeah, I think definitely it was a lot of excitement in the locker room and just on campus. A lot of hype about it. I know even students were excited, and they're not even playing in it. They just to be watching. It's the best conference I think to be in, so we're super excited to go and fight and compete every game.

THE MODERATOR: So, Coach Wilson, obviously there was a little bit of a runway. This didn't just happen. How



can go BigXII, you can go SEC. But to play in the ACC, which Debbie Antonelli, we always quote what she said. This is the best league for play guards, to be able to go play pro, to play professionally, this is the best league. It's proven. The stats have shown. The Sweet 16s, the Elite Eights, the Final Fours, they're going to get you there.

You're going to be challenged game in and game out. You're going to have the exposure. We can now say that to recruits and the appeal to be in Texas and stay home.

THE MODERATOR: It's a transition. Has there been any coaches that you have reached out to who have always kind of gone through a similar transition to help you?

TOYELLE WILSON: Well, just my tight circle of coaches where I've been, where I've coached. Coach Barnes Arico. I was under her for a couple of years. Everyone is just, like, excited for the opportunity.

Thankfully I've coached for two years at Michigan, six years at Baylor, been around great coaches, and knowing that level of recruiting and what it takes. That's what I kind of told my staff. It's a different grind, a different mentality, a different mindset, a different work ethic.

Now you're recruiting against the likes of the best in the country. So we're really up for that challenge, and I'm really excited about it.

Q. Coach, you've been on that level with the power four, power five conference. How do you get your players ready for that type of level for those that haven't been on there? I know Chantae was at Texas Tech. She's had a little bit of that experience. But how do you prep those that haven't?

TOYELLE WILSON: Yeah. So the biggest thing I think is competing in practice. You have to compete, make everything competitive. You have to require the best and push the best out of them with intensity, with focus, with a mindset, and I have told them that.

I said, you know, I have done this before. I know when you're about to get punched in the mouth, and you're going to have to know how to respond when you get punched in the mouth because the game is about runs.

So they know that, and that's why we're preparing ourselves. We went to Greece and Croatia this summer to get to learn each other, learn our personalities, because there are so many new kids on our team.

Also, like scrimmages against power fives we have coming up. That's going to help us to get punched in the mouth

and being able to respond because we're going to have some peaks and valleys throughout the year, let's be honest. It's how you respond.

What are you telling yourself in your mind? What is your mindset? For me it's just you've got to experience some hard and tough games. We have a hard out of conference schedule. We have four power four schools on our slate before we get to conference, which I think will help us.

Just, again, nothing substitutes for experience. I just said that to her. We've got to experience that in order to be used to that.

THE MODERATOR: You said you had four power fours already scheduled. Was that already in place, or did you change the schedule to make sure you were ready for ACC play?

TOYELLE WILSON: No, we had a couple. We were in a tournament. We didn't know who it was going to be, so we didn't know that. Then we scheduled three of them.

Just intentional. You always, no matter what conference you're going to be in, you want to prepare yourself and make it the hardest to prepare yourself for conference play where your strength of schedule now, the points when you play away, when you play at home if you lose.

Last year we played Baylor and Colorado at home. We were battling them for two, two and a half to three quarters, and now we have four out of conference.

It's really going to help us prepare us for conference play.

THE MODERATOR: Chantae, your Coach mentioned the trip to Croatia and Greece. What did you learn about this team?

CHANTAE EMBRY: I learned that we are a fun group to be around. Our tour guide, he actually said in all of his years doing his tours and everything, like, this was -- you can see how much we love each other, how much we connected.

To be fair, this was a completely new group. We're just learning each other, and we're going to go off to a whole new country. So just hearing that from him and just being able to witness, it's just really a testament to this program how much you can bring together a group of individuals and a group of people and how much we care for each other.

Just seeing that was amazing, and I'm just so grateful and so blessed to be a part of this group.

THE MODERATOR: T.K., what did you learn about your staff on this trip?

T.K. PITTS: They really, really care for us. They care for us off the court, especially. I think that showed in Croatia. We had one game, one scrimmage. Outside of that it was just vibes and fun. They can vibe and they want us to have fun. It was like a big family trip, honestly, like a family vacation. That's what I think about it as.

THE MODERATOR: That's a good mom.

T.K. PITTS: Yeah. It was definitely very fun. It was fun to have fun with them outside of basketball.

Q. T.K., a lot of people look at scoring when we talk about basketball, but when you look at your highlights, when you look at your stats, you're called a game facilitator. Especially on defense you can change the game. Talk about your role on this team and why you think people shouldn't overlook you.

T.K. PITTS: Right, yeah. I don't think I'm the best offensive player that's out there, and I'm definitely okay with that. I worked very hard on defense. I pride myself on defense. Defense wins championships. It gets the game going. It gets your team going. Deflections, tips, steals, rebounding. Coach T, she harps on me every day at practice for stuff like that just because she knows how capable I am with doing stuff like that.

You know, I love that. I take pride in it, and I know that's where I can show up every single day for my team. Just being a blue collar, working on the offensive glass, defensive glass. Put me on the best player. I want to guard the next player. Next team. I love it. It's competitive. It's my nature. So I'm definitely down for every game.

Q. (Off microphone).

T.K. PITTS: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Knowing you are going to the ACC, was there anything that you said to yourselves in the offseason, hey, I need to add this to my game?

CHANTAE EMBRY: For myself I was actually dealing with an injury for this past offseason in the summer. I had a stress fracture. For me I've really just been working hard on getting in the best shape as possible so I can be able to last through the fourth quarter, the overtimes, everything and that's not a reason for me to come out the game.

I will just say that and being able to see things for me being out on the sidelines even though it's just the offseason, it's just a summer. There are no games going on right now.

Just being able for me to see, like, the little things, what I need to do. Passes off a screen, just open plays that I can make, I think was just a big thing that I have been growing in my game.

T.K. PITTS: Yeah, I think me obviously it's built on being a defensive player, and I think opening the offensive side as well is definitely a big factor. Being able to score, being out for the kick-out for the three I think will be a big impact. Especially just being able -- coach T told me, I need you to be able to knock down a three. I just need you to be able to knock down a three.

Just getting that respect as well will also make it that much harder for the next team to scout us and play us and just give us that advantage.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Wilson, you mentioned you have been at the highest level. As you have come into October now and you are practicing with this team, are there areas that you know, hey, this is going to be our strength this season, and are there areas that you know right now we have to get better at?

TOYELLE WILSON: Yeah, I think just my biggest thing, and this is just in general, you can't turn the ball over, and you have to be able to rebound the basketball. You can't give up second chances.

Those are the two biggest things that I harp on in practice, and you can ask them, you know, some drills are it if you turn it over, if you give up an offensive rebound, we're going to run for it because you won't last. It will go from 0-0 to 10-0 run in an instance in the ACC. I've seen it happen.

But one thing I think you're going to like about this seem is we can score in different facets and different ways. We got scoring guards. We got scoring posts. We want to play fast and in transition. I think what you are going to see about this team is you can't really just scout one person.

Q. Chantae, one of the things I found when looking into you, you got the Ambassador Award in y'all's final year of the AAC. Talk about what that means to you to show not only just sportsmanship, but going outside of the basketball community and being involved in that aspect?

CHANTAE EMBRY: It's just an overwhelming feeling honestly with the community service aspect of it, I feel like I

can give back to others, and that's what I need to do. God brought me this gift in my life, so I need to pour back into other people with that.

Then when it comes to sportsmanship, I just let my game speak for itself. I don't really want to be the type of player that's really a trash talker to other teams or other players. You know, if you get me there -- it's a difference between being competitive and just really trash talking. I think both is great for the game, but just for me personally I'm just going to let my game speak for itself.

I think a lot of people and a lot of teams have seen that about me, so I was honored to receive that award.

T.K. PITTS: I'll do the talking for her.

THE MODERATOR: T.K., that was a nice assist, by the way. For each of you, give us a name of a teammate that fans need to be on the lookout for on your team.

T.K. PITTS: Z. I would say Z. Z and Nya. They're, like, little rats in practice. They are just going.

TOYELLE WILSON: Zanai Jones and Nya Robertson.

T.K. PITTS: Z, she's -- I call her my little Kyrie. She's, like, just like Kyrie. When you watch her in the game you're going to be, like, Wow. She's very poised. She can handle the ball. She has amazing IQ.

Nya, she can shoot the ball as far as Caitlin Clark, and she will. She's not going to hesitate. But she will also take you off the dribble. What are you going to do?

THE MODERATOR: So your sister going up this year.

CHANTAE EMBRY: I would say the same with both Z and Nya as well. I also want to mention Jess, Jessica Peterson. She wasn't playing with us last year. She had just her own story going on, whatever, but I think this season I've seen her grow so much, and it's really just been a testimony for her.

She can speak on that for herself. It's not my story to tell, but I've seen her just grow so much and her game has grown so much since our first season here. For her not to be able to play last year and her coming back the way that she has, it's just been amazing to watch.

I think teams definitely need to be on the lookout for her and fans need to be on the lookout for her.

THE MODERATOR: For each one of you, one word in this historical season for you all -- give me one word that you

want to encapsulate this coming year.

TOYELLE WILSON: I'll say connection.

T.K. PITTS: That was good.

TOYELLE WILSON: Thank you.

T.K. PITTS: What do you say?

CHANTAE EMBRY: I would say faith.

THE MODERATOR: See, I think that was good.

T.K. PITTS: That was good too. I would say -- this is a good question. Yeah, growth. Growth probably, yeah.

TOYELLE WILSON: Connection, faith, and growth.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, welcome to the ACC, and good luck in this inaugural season.

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