

University of Florida Women's Basketball Media Conference

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Scott Stricklin

University of Florida Athletics Director

Tammi Reiss

University of Florida Women's Basketball Head
Coach

Press Conference

JOHN MAXWELL: Good morning, everybody, and thank you for joining us today. It's an incredibly exciting time here at the University of Florida. We've got some big news to announce today. My name is John Maxwell. I'm the women's basketball communications contact here with the UAA.

A few housekeeping items before we get started. I will bring up director of athletics Scott Stricklin who will say a few words and then introduce our new head coach. Coach will start with an opening statement. We will then open things up to a Q & A session for as long as we can, and then for those who need it, we'll try and do some breakout sessions and some one-on-ones should you need them.

In addition, Scott will be available immediately following the formal Q & A portion of the press conference should you need to talk with him.

Then Coach Sumrall's press conference will begin shortly thereafter, at about 10:45 a.m., his normal press conference today.

If you would, as we're getting things going with the Q & A, please raise your hands so I can call on you to ask questions.

With that, let me welcome to the podium director of athletics Scott Stricklin.

SCOTT STRICKLIN: Thank you, John. Appreciate that. Appreciate everybody being here this morning. Before I get going introducing Tammy to Gator Nation, the UAA is full of really special coaches and staff, and it's really special when they come together to support each other.



We actually had a scheduled head coaches' dinner last night to see the way they interact with one another and lean on each other, support one another. It was really special. Really proud that our men's staff is here today. Todd, thank you for you guys being here. I think that speaks to it, as well.

It's not just coaches, it's staff, as well, and we are blessed to have some exceptionally talented and dedicated people at the University of Florida in athletics.

Specifically related to this search process, I want to give a special shout out to Jeff Guin and Amy Hass and Duke Werner for kind of leading this process and helping us identify a really talented pool of candidates, which led us, of course, to where we are today.

It's an exciting day for the University of Florida, for our women's basketball team, because we get a chance to welcome a proven winner, a relentless competitor, an exceptional leader who's going to be our next women's basketball coach, Tammi Reiss.

In Coach Reiss the Gators have found an experienced leader who can elevate UF's program in the SEC and on the national stage, someone who builds culture, develops players and recruits at an elite level.

In her time at Rhode Island, she transformed that program into a championship contender, but just as importantly, she built a culture rooted in toughness, accountability and belief.

Tammi's accomplishments are really impressive. If you read her story and as you learn more about her, she has one of the more fascinating backgrounds of any coach you'll come across.

But just speaking of her basketball background, an all-American at Virginia, fifth overall pick in the very first WNBA Draft. She has both played and coached in a Final Four. She's won multiple conference championships as a head coach, and was three-time conference Coach of the Year at Rhode Island. She's competed at the highest level, and she knows what it takes to win.



Just as importantly, she knows how to build. She's built programs. She's built relationships, and she's built cultures that last.

As we all know, women's basketball, like every other sport in the SEC, is as competitive as it's ever been, and we at Florida believe that we are positioned to win and win big. Thanks to the support of Gator Nation and our supporters and our boosters, the investment in Florida women's basketball program has never been stronger.

Coach Reiss shares the vision for what can happen here, and she's ready to get to work. If you would please join me in welcoming the new women's basketball coach at the University of Florida, Tammi Reiss.

TAMMI REISS: Well, those are very, very kind words, Scott. Thank you so much.

First of all, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out today. I am so blessed, honored and humbled by this opportunity to lead and be the head coach of the University of Florida women's basketball. It is truly an honor.

I do apologize for my voice. I'm coming straight off of March Madness, haven't slept in two days, so it's a little raspy. It gets better, I promise.

I'd be remiss if I didn't start with thank-yous for the Florida leadership. The first one goes out to Dr. Donald Landry, the interim president; the University of Florida board of trustees; athletic director Scott Stricklin; and the search committee, the big three: Duke, Amy and Jeff. Thank you so much for believing in me and my vision to be the next leader. It means the world to me. It really does.

Now I need to thank my old family. Thank you to the University of Rhode Island, especially Thorbjorn, the athletic director, the old athletic director, who gave me my first shot at being a head coach and believed in me enough to let me lead that program, supported us with resources to get ultimately to our vision, which was win championships and get to March Madness, which we did.

I also want to thank Rhody Nation. I am forever grateful for your support, your belief in myself and my program, and everything we did.

To my staff, my incredible coaching staff, the loyalist, the most hardworking, most supportive, thank you for giving me the best year of my life, truly, on and off the court. I will forever miss you.

Lastly, to my team. Coaches are only as good as their

players, and we all know this. Players win basketball games. This year my players were the most incredible young women and student-athletes that gave everything they had on and off the court to myself, my coaching staff, their university and their community, and I would not be standing here if it were not for them.

I think they know how much I love them, and again, I am forever indebted and will forever be grateful, and I wish the University of Rhode Island, I wish my staff, I wish Rhody Nation, and most of all, I wish my players the best of luck in their future endeavors, and anytime we play a Rhode Island school, like Danny Hurley said, you know I'll say, go Rhody.

To my college coach Debbie Ryan: This is why I coach. She gave me the best four years of my life as a student-athlete. She taught me what a true coach, a teacher, a mentor should be, and I would not be in this profession, I would not love college athletics as much as I do had it not been for her. Also, she gave me my first assistant coaching job at the University of Virginia when I was 22 years old, and I was a pill. I was awful. So Debbie, I apologize.

But again, she was the example, and she's the reason I coach. So thank you, Debbie Ryan.

To Mr. Paul Talowski, my sixth grade teacher, to the man who had the most influence on my life other than my parents. He taught me every intangible quality that a young woman should have, on and off the court. He got me to commit to academics. He taught me work ethic, goal setting, character, integrity, and he taught me to dream big, and he's the first man to ever believe in me, that I could do things that I never believed I could ever achieve.

Mr. T, you know what I mean to me, and I love you, and thank you for everything you've poured into me.

To my parents: The most supportive sacrificing parents that would give and sacrifice anything to help me achieve my goals and my success, and family is everything to me. It is. I'm an only child. I would like to say I was spoiled rotten, but I had a dad that didn't believe in that. My parents believed in work ethic, commitment, how you do anything is how you do everything, and I'm so very thankful that they taught me the value system, the morality, the integrity and the character I have today.

Again, I would not be here had it not been for how they raised me and how they supported me, so I love you, mom and dad.

Lastly, every coach, every leader in this room knows

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

behind the scenes you have a rock. You have someone that takes care of everything so you can go be great. My rock is Krystal. So Krystal, I thank you for the years of support, for how many times you've moved your life and your career to support mine, and most of all, for being there not just through the good times but for those really hard times when I needed you most. I love you, and thank you for being my better half.

After the thank yous, and that was a lot because those people are -- you'll find out, they're who shaped me. I am a people person. I am a relationship person. And I don't forget people. That was really, really important to me.

Now the future. Why Florida? Why the University of Florida? I'd have to say this university checks every box for me, both personally and professionally. Personally I'm an East Coast girl, born and bred in New York. Most of my family now has migrated down south to the Carolinas, Florida, and I have friends and family and I'm not leaving the East Coast and I'm not leaving my family.

Elephant in the room: The weather. I'm an outdoor girl, and as you can see, I think I got a pretty good tan. I love the sun. I love being active. I love being able to wear shorts and a tank top. I got snowed in three weeks ago in a blizzard and couldn't leave my house for three days, so obviously I love the Florida weather.

The academic and athletic balance, the reputation of the University of Florida academically. I went to the University of Virginia for a reason. I wanted to be a true student-athlete. I wanted a degree when I walked into a job that meant something, that would get me that job. The University of Florida has that reputation, and that is very important to me. So it was extremely attractive to get the best of both worlds.

I am a builder. I love to take things that need to be restructured and rebuilt. I'll give you a couple stories. University of Virginia, I was recruited by every college in America. I chose the University of Virginia because I wanted to leave a mark and a legacy. They had never won an ACC championship. They had never gone to a Final Four.

So instead of being another horse in the stable, I wanted that. I wanted to be the first, not the second, not the third. So I chose the University of Virginia with my backcourt mate Dawn Staley, and we won the first ACC championship. We won two of them. We went to three Final Fours, a National Championship game.

Now, we were the 0-for club, 0 for 3, but we led them to a place they'd never been. We packed the stands and they

became sold out. So I left my mark and my legacy. We built that, and it will forever be etched at the University of Virginia.

I chose the University of Rhode Island when I first was looking at the program, bottom of the conference, abysmal, on the court, in the classroom, in the community. When I got there, I loved it. I could build it my way. I'd like to say I think I left it better than I inherited it.

This year we won the A-10 championship. We won the A-10 tournament championship, which has never been done there in 50 years, in the history of the program. We went to the second March Madness. We went dancing only for the second time, and it had been 30 years. Left my mark, left a legacy.

Again, I'm very proud of that. So why the University of Florida? Same thing. I believe in the potential and the greatness of the University of Florida. It's a place where I can restructure it. I can rebuild it. There's a few things they've never done here, and I think the most glaring one, obviously, is they have not won a National Championship. Not won a National Championship.

There are some things here that I can leave my mark. I can leave a legacy, and I can rebuild it. That's what I do. I don't like to inherit. I like to build.

That's another reason I chose the University of Florida.

The commitment, as Scott talked about, to the basketball program, the resources needed to compete and win at the level, they matched my vision. So the alignment from administration to myself to my staff to my players is going to be to compete that first year, get to the postseason, gradually trust in the process, win championships, SEC Championships, and ultimately, every head coach's goal, and if it isn't, I don't think you should be coaching, is to win a National Championship.

So with the commitment level and what I was looking for, administration and Scott, they came on board. That's a main reason I chose the University of Florida.

Competing at the highest level in the best conference in America, the SEC. To look to your left and right down the sidelines and you see will Vic Schaefer, Kim Mulkey, one of my good friends, the GOAT, Dawn Staley. As a competitor, I wanted that. I want to test and I want the highest level. I want to see how good I can be.

Coming from that mid major level, there wasn't anything satisfying that fire. So the next step is I want to compete just like I did when I was a player. I want to compete



against the best, and the SEC is the best. It is simply the best in women's basketball.

Then I think lastly, surrounded by greatness every day. Great minds, great people, great leaders of championships, great achievers. Coming into this environment, how I could learn from them and be inspired by them every day.

49 National Championships, 50 on the way, no pressure, gymnastics, just so you know. 49 National Championships. 269 conference championships. Top 10 in the director's club. Every year. Top 10 every year. That is greatness.

So last night when I went to a head coaches' dinner I was sitting next to people that won 14 National Championships. I get to shake hands with Todd Golden. I get to walk across the way and sit in his office and watch how he works. I get to learn from that. I've already studied everything he's done for the past two years. I even, sleep and breathe it.

Now I'm in an environment of champions. That is why I chose the University of Florida.

The vision. The vision is I'm going to bring high-energy fierce competition, passion, compassion and great leadership to the university and to the women's basketball program. Every day I'm committed to excellence. I will only hire people on my staff that row the same way. We will be committed to the excellence, to the student-athlete experience, to developing our players, to pouring into our players, and committed to winning championships, on the court, in the classroom, and in the community.

The main way we're going to do this is culture. People throw that word around a lot, culture. But it's how I've built everything I've ever achieved, whether as a player, whether as an academic student, whether as a coach. Everything we do, we will do the right way based on pillars of integrity, character, moral compass. Things like commitment, accountability, responsibility, leadership, service, trust, loyalty, and humility.

I promise you that we will have a winning culture. That is the foundation. Everything comes after that.

We will fight and we will compete every game. The highest compliment that anyone can give me as we walk off the court is, damn, your team plays hard. That's what we will put on the floor every night. Every practice and every game, we will compete for you, and you will be proud of our product.

Style of play. I like to play fast on both sides of the ball. I like to run. I like to score, and I like to get into people on the other side. We'll defend. So we're looking to play fast.

I like players that can pass, dribble and shoot. I used to be a totally defensive-minded coach, rebound and defense wins championships, until I couldn't score 45 points last year, and I took a page out of Danny Hurley's book and Geno Auriemma's book, and they said, listen, sweetie, you've got to go get some players that can pass, shoot and dribble and teach them the game of basketball.

I did that this year. We won a championship at Rhode Island. And by chance, we were the No. 1 defensive team in the league. I don't understand how that happened, but I think that's just who I am. You'd better get after it at that end.

But we will recruit offense and we will play fast. Not to say that defense and rebounding won't come into play. We will focus on player development. People will come here to become pros. We will focus on retention for four years so we can touch you as a freshman and we can grow you every day, not just as a basketball player but as a student and as a young woman.

We promise you, I will hire the best to develop you for four years.

In closing, I really came here to leave a mark and leave a legacy. 10, 15 years from now when I'm doing my retirement press conference, I hope I can say I left my mark and I left my legacy. I hope I can say I did what I promised: I put a great product on the floor and in the classroom and in the community. I brought SEC conference championships to the university.

Lastly, that big hanging fruit, we grabbed that National Championship, and I definitely hope all of you say, Coach, thank you for leaving this place better than you inherited it.

If you know me, this is me. Go hard or go home. Go Gators.

Q. Coach, obviously a lot has been made of your experience, something Scott was talking a lot about. Along the way, what's the biggest thing you learned that will translate to the much higher level of competition in the SEC?

TAMMI REISS: Well, I think you've got to focus on you. You don't focus on the levels. You focus on what's made you successful. If you've done that at a very young age, whether you're successful in middle school, high school, college, there's levels to everything, but the foundation

never changes. So what my parents instilled in me, the hard work, doing things the right way, no entitlement, competing, those things, they translate no matter what level.

Whether you're coaching Division II or high school -- I know some really good coaches. It doesn't matter the level. Your greatness is defined by who you are and what you do.

For me, that's what I focus on: Me, us, how we're going to do things, not actually the level.

Q. What's the first thing you want to do in your new position?

TAMMI REISS: God, the first thing I want to do is meet the team, have meetings with the team. Obviously get the staff together as quick as possible so we can hit the ground running, assemble the right people.

But really, really take care of the student-athletes that are here right now and make sure academically, athletically, get to those meetings, talk with their parents, and then assemble a staff, and really get down here, get moved in, and get to work ASAP.

But the first week, first couple days, really, really got to get to the team, get your staff assembled and get to work.

Q. Where on your list of priorities is connecting with fans and the community and trying to build that aspect, create an atmosphere? It's kind of been lacking for a while.

TAMMI REISS: Well, I think you have so many hats as a head coach, and the hat I love the most is people. If you look at my background, I have an acting background. I'm an actress, studied, went to school, movies. I enjoy people. I love it. The cameras come on, let's go.

I can walk into any room, and I'm going to teach the young ladies on the team, that's called service. That's your job. You go out and you build connections.

I learned it in the WNBA, where the NBA I would stay around, our team, two and a half hours after games. We signed every autograph. We took every picture because we had to build that league to what it's become today. We were the pioneers when there was no one in the stands and you had to market your league. We've learned to do that.

Women's basketball is about connections. It's about building relationships, whether it's with your team, coaching

staff, internally, with the university, but most of all, with your fans, making them feel a part of your family. I'll use that word a lot.

Rhody Nation, Ryan Center was rocking. When I first got there, there was five people and they were the men's basketball players, and we ended where I probably got over 500, 600 texts, all our true fans, every radio show, every speaking engagement, they travel with us on the road, they all have my cell phone number. I don't know if I can do that now, but literally that's what you do.

So going into the community as soon as possible, meeting all the alumni, boosters, bringing all the greats back, creating a buzz. That's what I do, and that's what I enjoy doing the most is not just the basketball side, but there's a business side to being a head coach. There really is. That's the marketing, that's the fan base. That's my job and my players' jobs to put a good product on the floor and to go out and get people excited.

It may be brick by brick. If I learned anything from Dawn Staley when I asked advice years ago, I said, D, how did you build that? There was nobody in the stands. She said, T, you don't sleep, and you get out and you work. You work.

So I don't plan on sleeping at all this year. But I'll get out in the community, and we'll get fired up. That's what we do. Not just me, my staff and our players. They will know our players.

Q. Tammy, you mentioned culture. It's thrown out a lot by coaches. How do you go about resetting culture, and what does it look like behind the scenes?

TAMMI REISS: I think the biggest challenge when you come in and you take over a team that you didn't recruit, I've been fans of them, I've watched them play a lot, but we call them -- they're not my kids. I didn't get a chance to build those relationships for years during the recruiting process.

Kelly built great relationships with these kids, and I've known Kelly a long time, and that's who she is as a woman. She loves the student-athlete.

They're very loyal to Kelly. They love that experience. So coming into that environment, you've got to, number one, sit down; who still wants to be a part of University of Florida? Who believes in me? Can I relationship with them quick enough that they trust me with their career? Their parents trust me?

So I've got to get to them, and I've got to see who wants to



be a part of the University of Florida.

People criticize the portal all the time and this and that, but everyone has the right to find their home and their right fit. Everyone does. I want people that want to be here, for so many more reasons than just basketball. Education, the community, they love it here. It's my job to build that relationship as quick as possible to see, do you trust me, can you believe in the new vision, can you -- this is the culture, and it's a tough culture. Do you want to be a part of that?

Then we'll go from there. But it's really about, again, you've got to want to be here and you've got to want to love the University of Florida, and you've got to want to embrace the new vision, not the old vision.

Q. I just wanted to ask, what have the conversations been like? You touched on Coach Staley, but what have those conversations been like from the point you accepted this position?

TAMMI REISS: Well, Dawn has been a mentor. She's one of my best friends. Dawn has helped me through every point of my career. That's what sisterhood is. That's what being with people for four years in college, meaningful relationships. It's what I love most about it. Dawn has always been my rock behind the scenes, great advice, I learned from her. I steal from everybody.

She gave me great advice on every job I chose, the good, the bad, what I'd have to do. So I lean on her a great deal.

I only take advice from people that are really, really successful. So Dawn has been there for me.

She gave me great advice about this job and the pitfalls and the great things and moving forward. But people that know you -- Dawn knows me. She knows what I'm like. When people said, don't take Rhode Island, it's a dog, you're not going to win there, they gave me all the can'ts, why-nots, all of it, and Dawn said, T, I know you; if it fits you and they support you, go do it. You'll turn it around. She was right.

She said the same thing about the University of Florida. T, if they support you and they believe in women's basketball and they're committed, do it. Do it. Then after that, I said, okay, D, I got you, and she said, now it's on. She goes, you know I'm going to have to kill you and beat you. I said that's all right, D; we'll see.

Q. What challenges do you anticipate when rebuilding this team, and how do you plan to attack them?

TAMMI REISS: You know, the challenge, number one, our retention, the commitment, how many kids you're returning, obviously, the construction of your team, and then the portal. Finding the right pieces in the portal. Number one is culture. You never sacrifice culture to win. Culture, and then being able to assemble those pieces to the style of play you want to play.

So really trying to get the right pieces to play the way you want to play and be extremely competitive. I want to be really competitive that first year. We want to go to postseason. That's the goal.

But roster construction is the key. It really is. You've got to get to work. The portal opens the day after the women's championship game, so getting that staff together so we can construct, knowing what pieces we have, so then we can go fill out the pie chart and know what pieces we need to go get.

Q. Growing up in the Catskill region, I know it's kind of known for basketball. How did that shape you as a person and as a player?

TAMMI REISS: Basketball was life up there. We played every asphalt court outdoors, every camp, Cathy Rush, Blue Star. It's just embedded, the Tri-State area for me. I'm right on the verge of Jersey, New York and Philly, Pennsylvania. So the best ballers back in the day -- I played with guys like Kenny Anderson and the Hurleys and it just was unbelievable basketball.

It shaped me. I played against guys; I didn't play against girls. I went to the courts -- if you can get on a court and the guys pick you up, you can hoop. It's who I am. That gritty New York streak, that's what I am. I'm a fighter. My heroes, my favorite two movies are "Rocky" and "Rudy," so combine those, and that's who I am.

Q. When it comes to you mentioned roster construction, this was a young team last year. When the portal opens, how much is going to be getting those fourth- and even fifth-year transfers going to be a priority to make sure -- to have some more veteran leadership in such a tough conference like the SEC?

TAMMI REISS: What you hope for, and they were very young and they were competitive. I watched a lot of their games. I've been studying them on film now. But if you can try to keep some of those young pieces -- because now they have experience. They're not so young anymore. They've played through the gauntlet. They should be experienced; those little sophomores now become juniors, now they're ready.

Obviously you want to go in the portal and get great leadership. I've always loved grad transfers. I usually recruit within conference, too. It just adds a little edge. They have something to prove in conference. You know what you're getting. They know the league.

You know, experience and leadership, core values. It's a key. So yes, we don't just want to sign fresh. We want to build a roster and construct a roster that can be very competitive right off the bat.

Senior leadership, people that have done it and performed, all-conference kids, that's what we're looking for. If you can build around that core, you have a shot. You have a real shot here.

Q. Mr. T, what did he teach you that you carry with you now 30 years later?

TAMMI REISS: So he saw me -- back in the day, we used to have intramurals and you used to go and play dodgeball and kickball and basketball, so I'd be out there, and I was a little tomboy. I'm shooting around. I was in fifth grade. He comes up and he says, let me show you something on your form, on your jump shot. So he starts teaching me.

So that next year he puts in to get me as one of his students. Now he's my sixth grade teacher and I walk in -- I was cocky. I walk in, and I'm a B+ student. I was good enough. I had my basketball. I carried it everywhere I went.

I walk in and he grabs the ball, he puts it in the closet and he locks it, and he says, I'm not teaching you one thing until you become an A student. I said, what? I said, I'm B+, that's pretty good. It's like 89. He said, not one thing. You become an A student, I'll live after school with you every day.

Needless to say, end of first marking period, straight 4.0, A+, gives me the ball back. From that day until he trained me during the WNBA days, every day after school three, three and a half hours every day. I practiced with the boys' team. He was the boys' coach.

So he taught me, and then he would play one-on-one with me. I was about 4'2". He didn't let me score for a year, and he broke my nose three times.

He taught me, like no, there's no second -- you either win or you lose. There's no -- there's no "here's a ribbon." He taught me how to compete.

That first time I scored on him, it had to be like a Kareem sky hook when I went to the cup because he was 6'7", and

when I scored on him, he didn't hear the end of it for like a year. Those are the things he instilled in me, just how to compete at a very, very high level.

Then the relationship we had, it was special. I talk to these players here, you'll have people in your life that touch you, that are your people, and that's my guy, that make you believe in yourself so much. I said, I'm going to play in the NBA. I come from a little small podunk town not even on the map. One streetlight, one gas station, one grocery store. So everyone said, who do you think you -- you're not going to college; you can't do that; you can't. That's all they ever said. And I'm small, I'm 5'5".

He said, write your goals down, and I gave him 150 goals. I didn't accomplish three. Three.

You have those merchants in your life that just -- they transform you. For me, other than my parents, it was him. There's so many things I can say, but players know. They know. They've got people in their lives that just make all the difference, and it's teachers, it's CYO coaches, it's college coaches. Those are the people that transform lives. That's why I coach.

Q. Then you mentioned obviously Dawn, Vic and Kim, big-time competitors, big-time budgets. What's the number -- there's got to be a number. Do you have to have a million dollar roster now to compete in the SEC? Is it \$2 million?

TAMMI REISS: Well, depending on your process of where you're in -- I wouldn't have taken this job had we not had the money to compete, number one, and not bet on myself that I can't fundraise because that's the other hat you must have as a head coach.

My business background enables me to do that. I owned a nightclub, the Manhattan Club, in Salt Lake City for 10 years, and try getting a liquor license in Salt Lake City as a woman. (Laughter). And I owned a minority club in Salt Lake City as a woman. That was hard. That was really hard. Going out and fundraising, that's what I love to do.

When I was at the University of Rhode Island, the most they ever fundraised in a year was \$8,000. The most I fundraised in a year was \$338,000. I fundraised over \$1.2 to \$1.4 million in my seven years, started the charter. We never had a charter, and we did when I left. We had a lot of charters. Never had a wellness program. We did when I left. And never had NIL. I had a very small amount of NIL this past year. Very small. We constructed a roster that won a championship.

But I supplemented that very small NIL with good NIL. But

the commitment here this year, and I don't know if Scott wants me to tell you this, but when my agent was negotiating, I don't like to do it, I like to focus on my team and let an agent do it, but he came back and he said, they didn't blink. Here, they didn't even negotiate. They hit every point that you needed to be successful at the University of Florida.

That's commitment. I would not have taken this job if I didn't believe in the commitment from the administration, and I believe in Scott. I believe in the administration. And I want more. So I'll go out and get it. That's my job. It's not just to be a head coach. I'll do what I need to do to win. That's what Mr. T taught me.

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