

July 14, 2014



An interview with:

COMMISSIONER MIKE SLIVE

KEVIN TRAINOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 2014 SEC Media Days.

It is my honor and privilege to introduce the commissioner of the Southeastern Conference, Mike Slive.

COMMISSIONER SLIVE: Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, once again on behalf of our 14 head football coaches and our 42 players who we'll meet this week, welcome to the 30th edition of the SEC Media Days.

Those of you who know me know that I am a bit of a history buff. It was on this day in 1968 that the great Hank Aaron hit his 500th home run, a three-run shot off Mike McCormick for a 4-2 win over the San Francisco Giants.

It was also on this day in 1968 that I married my beautiful bride Liz.

So with all due respect to Hammerin' Hank, he only hit a three-run homer on this day 46 years ago, but I hit a Grand Slam. Liz is here today in the back of the room.

Happy anniversary, honey. It's been an incredible journey for nearly half a century.

Speaking of journeys, this past year our student-athletes traveled down a road paved with achievements and accolades which brings me to my annual SEC brag bag. As Muhammad Ali said, It's not bragging if you can back it up.

The accomplishments of our teams and our student-athletes do just that.

Conference teams won seven national championships in the sports of men's golf, gymnastics, equestrian, men's swimming, women's swimming and diving, women's outdoor track and field, softball and baseball, along with six national runner-up finishes.

In addition the SEC finished in the top five in 13 of the 21 sports we sponsor.

We competed for our eighth consecutive football national championship. The game was

just a minute too long. We played in the NCAA men's basketball tournament final. We won the college softball and baseball World Series.

During the past three years, half of the conference teams have played in national championship games in football, men's basketball and baseball. And speaking of baseball, the SEC has won the national championship four of the last six years. In the last seven years, the SEC has played in the College World Series final with six different teams.

In terms of individual awards, Alabama gymnast Kim Jacob won the prestigious Honda Cup, the highest honor presented to a female student-athlete recognizing achievements in the gym, in the classroom and in the community.

In June, the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association awarded the Dick Howser National Player of the Year trophy to Kentucky's A.J. Reed. The award known as the baseball Heisman, recognized A.J. for his play on the field in two positions and his success in the classroom.

Florida's softball student-athlete Hannah Rogers led Florida to its first national championship in softball and she was named the college World Series most outstanding player.

Both A.J. and Hannah were named Roy Kramer athletes of the year this year as voted by our league's athletic directors.

12 years ago when I became the commissioner of the SEC, one of my goals was to build a bridge to prepare the conference for its future. What we do today, how we handle our successes and meet our challenges will determine the SEC of tomorrow.

Much of this bridge is in place, including implementing strategies to build a culture of compliance, increasing diversity, as shown in the hiring of our first minority head football coaches, creating new academic initiatives embodied by SECUC, enhancing the conference's national exposure through significant television agreements, expanding the conference with the addition of Texas A&M and Missouri, and playing an important role in national intercollegiate affairs.

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This past year we've focused on strengthening this bridge by finalizing our football scheduling format, enhancing our post-season football opportunities, analyzing our fans' in-stadium experience, developing the SEC Network, and working to restructure the NCAA.

As you know, we spent a great deal of time this past year reviewing the conference's football scheduling format. In May we announced we will continue with the current eight-game conference schedule. The strength and depth of the SEC was certainly a determining factor in this decision since the concept of strength of schedule is based on the entire 12-game schedule.

To strengthen our non-conference scheduling, each team is required to play at least one non-conference team from either the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 or the PAC-12 on an annual basis.

So supplementing our traditional and existing non-conference rivalry games, our schools have scheduled games with Notre Dame, Michigan, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Kansas State and Arizona, just to name a few.

Now to complement the new college football playoff, we partnered with the Big 12 to position the Sugar Bowl in prime time on January 1st with the Rose Bowl as a lead-in.

I mention the Sugar Bowl here because it representing a paradigm shift in how our conference can relate to its bowls. Under the new SEC bowl arrangement, the Capital Bowl will have the first selection of available SEC teams after the college football playoff, the Sugar Bowl, and in some years the Orange Bowl.

Once these selections are made, six bowls, the Belk Bowl, the AutoZone Liberty Bowl, the Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl, the Outback Bowl, the TaxSlayer Bowl, and the AdvoCare Texas Bowl will constitute a pool. The conference will assign teams to each of these games rather than doing it the old-fashioned way where the bowl selected the teams.

Before making that final decision, the conference will consult with our institutions and with the bowls, but the decision will be ours.

We also have agreements with the Birmingham Bowl and the Duck Commander Independence Bowl.

We all know how passionate SEC fans are, whether watching games in our stadiums or at home. The facts bear this out. For the 16th consecutive year, the conference led the country in attendance, averaging nearly 76,000 fans per game. Over 7.5 million fans went to our game,

setting a new season conference attendance record.

So while we continue to enjoy this wonderful support from our fans, we want to be sure that it continues and that they continue to have a positive game experience. So to that end we put together a fan experience working group. This year the group, in conjunction with our member institutions, began an ongoing fan research project in 60 different categories, so we can better understand what our fans expect.

We reached out to more than 850,000 SEC fans in football, men's and women's basketball, baseball, and softball. We'll continue this project for several years so we can measure over time what the expectation is for the greatest fans in America.

It's hard for me to believe but exactly one month from today, August 4th, the SEC Network will make its debut. To date, providers of the SEC Network include AT&T U-Verse and the DISH Network, making the SEC Network available to everyone nationwide.

Last week we were pleased to announce the addition of Cox Communications to our list of providers.

In addition we have agreements to distribute the network with Google Fiber and several cable cooperatives. Rest assured, there are ongoing conversations with other major providers.

This is a commercial. I strongly encourage anyone interested in the SEC Network to visit getSECnetwork.com.

Live events will be the focus of the network. Each Saturday during the season we will televise three football games, our triple headers. We will kickoff the football season with a doubleheader on Thursday night, August 28th, with South Carolina visiting A&M, following by Vanderbilt at Temple.

Saturday we'll have our first triple header including a conference game with Arkansas at Auburn, followed by a rare Sunday night game when Tennessee hosts Utah State.

By the fourth week of the season, the SEC Network will have originated a game from every stadium in the conference. Brent Musburger, along with former SEC student-athlete Jesse Palmer and Maria Taylor will cover one of the three games. Dari Nowkhah will be joined by former SEC student-athletes Greg McElroy and Booger



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McFarland to provide interviews and analysis.

Additionally the network will feature SEC Nation, a signature two-hour on-site pregame show. The show will originate from a different SEC campus every Saturday at 10:00 a.m. eastern. SEC Nation will be hosted by Joe Tessitorre, along with former student-athletes Tim Tebow and Marcus Spears, along with Paul Finebaum.

We're talking about football, and it's football season. Football is just one of the sports the network will cover. In our first year alone we will carry more than 100 men's basketball games, 60 women's basketball games, 75 baseball games, and 50 softball games.

In addition, we will carry much of the SEC men's and women's basketball tournaments, as well as SEC softball and baseball tournaments.

Needless to say, throughout the week, we'll have additional programs including highlights, many of the press conferences of our football coaches, the Paul Finebaum Show and many other things to be announced.

SEC stories, the documentary series will provide the network with new and compelling programming. We plan to air four new films within the first month. The stories include a range of topics, profiles of some notable and colorful SEC fans, a film about the legendary trio of Bo, Barkley and the Big Hurt. A film about Coach Spurrier, and a film about Chucky Mullins and Brad Gaines.

Justin Connolly, ESPN senior vice president and general manager of the network, will be here with you on Wednesday morning at 10:30 to share further news about the SEC Network.

Focused on the SEC and the achievements of our teams and student-athletes, we are actively involved in the national issues that impact all of intercollegiate athletics. It's an historic time.

We continue to believe the uniquely American endeavor of intercollegiate athletics is properly supported on our campuses as an integral and important part of higher education.

Although we must be willing to make appropriate changes in intercollegiate athletics, education must remain at the core of what we do. We must keep athletics and academics properly integrated and ensure that our university's educational missions are fulfilled.

Florida's basketball player Patric Young is an example of a student-athlete who has made the most of his collegiate academic and athletic experience.

He led the Gators to the 2014 SEC men's basketball tournament title and the NCAA Final Four. Was named the SEC Scholar Athlete of the Year twice. Was named the SEC male winner of the Brad Davis Community Service Award. Then he traveled to Africa where he encouraged children to focus on exercise and healthy lifestyle.

While doing all of that, Patric maintained a 3.4 grade point average.

Student-athletes like Patric, as well as many other student-athletes like him, inspire us to protect intercollegiate athletics, to keep it healthy, vibrant and an integral part of higher education.

We do this for the young men and women who seek an education, compete in sports, and ultimately make a difference in people's lives.

This is why it is critical for the NCAA to change, and to change in accordance with the vision proposed for the 21st century by the five conferences.

This is one important way we will be able to provide academic and athletic opportunities for the generations of Patrics yet to come.

We are not deaf to the din of discontent across collegiate athletics that has dominated the news.

In the words of former president Dwight David Eisenhower, I quote, Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.

With Eisenhower's admonition in mind, we have created the initiative to restructure the NCAA in accordance with our vision for the 21st century with the support of student-athletes at its core.

The educational and cultural significance of intercollegiate athletics is far too important for us not to seek positive solutions to existing challenges. This is why we have been actively engaged in building a bridge to provide a needed avenue of change for the NCAA with the primary objective of enhancing the support enjoyed by Division I student-athletes while maintaining and preserving the collegiate model.

Winston Churchill wrote, Continuous effort is the key to unlocking our potential.

The world of intercollegiate athletics is full of potential. I am certain that our efforts today will ensure its future for tomorrow.

For those of you who have been here before, this is not a new effort on our part. The SEC's call for change was introduced at Media Days in 2011 and will continue until we realize the

desired outcomes.

Over the last year we, along with our colleagues at the ACC, Big Ten, Big 12 and PAC-12, developed this new vision for intercollegiate athletics for the 21st century.

It includes the NCAA's enactment of a governing system that will provide greater autonomy for the SEC and other four conferences for the benefit of student-athletes.

The ongoing review of the NCAA governing structure is intended to provide for the introduction of new strategies and new ideas. With a new structure in place, amongst other goals, we seek to support the educational needs of our student-athletes through the provisions of scholarships linked to cost of attendance rather than the historic model of tuition, room and board, fees and books.

To enhance the opportunity to support a quality undergraduate education for our student-athletes for both their playing years and beyond if needed, to better assist student-athletes seeking to transition from college athletics into the world of professional sport, and to expand the existing health and wellness support provided to student-athletes. This is a very small, partial list of what we hope and dream to accomplish.

As I have said before, if we do not achieve a positive outcome under the existing big tent of Division I, we will need to consider the establishment of a venue with similar conferences and institutions where we can enact the desired changes in the best interests of our student-athletes.

The NCAA's Division I board of directors has invested significant time and effort in the restructuring process. The steering committee on governance will soon issue its final recommendations to the NCAA board for recommendation in a meeting and a vote scheduled for August 7. So we will know soon.

It's important that the NCAA governance steering committee continue its support for autonomous decision making among the five conferences, including proper voting thresholds to allow for the enactment of meaningful change.

While acknowledging the angst among some conferences and institutions in Division I, I remain optimistic that working together we can create a framework that places the academic and athletic success of the student-athlete front and center.

It's an exciting time for me, for college sports and for the SEC. The challenges that lay

ahead in my view are not obstacles but really opportunities to forge a bridge and to make the road to the future stronger for everyone involved in intercollegiate athletics.

Nelson Mandela once said, and I quote, Sport has the power to change the world, it has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.

We see the truth of Mr. Mandela's statement in numerous ways in college athletics. Our athletics programs provide fundamental lessons in leadership and teamwork that have an irreplaceable role in the greater world of business, government, military and academic pursuits.

Title IX has had a tremendous and positive effect, with impacts extending well beyond the playing field. College athletics continues to play an important role in racial integration in our country.

College athletics has a unique power to change lives. We support reform, but it's essential that reform be implemented in a way that preserves the positive role that college athletics plays in the lives of our student-athletes, other students, and society at large.

Ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate each of you being here today. If you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to call on any member of our communications staff.

As always, I wish you a productive and interesting week. As always, may the muse be with you.

Thank you very much.

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