

July 15, 2014



An interview with:

COACH STEVE SPURRIER

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're proud to have the head coach of the South Carolina Gamecocks, Coach Steve Spurrier.

COACH SPURRIER: Glad to be here again. Glad to see I guess some familiar faces out there. Get ready for talking season. That's what we're all doing right now, talking a little bit till we start practice August 1st, August 2nd, get ready for the 2014 season.

We got a pretty good team we think. Most of the magazines got us about 9, 10, 11 in the country, something like that. Hopefully we can live up to that prediction.

But we do have a lot of good players, wonderful attitudes on the team. We're looking forward to seeing what happens August 28th. We start the season Thursday night, Texas A&M, very good team comes in, Coach Sumlin and his guys.

We got them at home, Williams-Brice. Got a pretty good win streak going there, as most of you know. I know our fans will be pumped up, screaming, yelling, ready to go. We're trying to get ready the best we can for the opening game and proceed from there.

Dylan Thompson is going to be our quarterback. Hopefully he can stay healthy the entire season. We really believe he's a very good player, has a chance to lead us to a big season, has a chance.

He's a fifth-year player. He's been to all the games. He's 3-0 as a starter. Played the entire game last year against Central Florida. Connor Shaw got hurt in the first quarter. He's the only quarterback in the nation to beat UCF. He's obviously played, he's a good player, ready to go.

He's got to pack his college career into one season. He's the type of young man that

really wants to make the most of it. Hopefully that will happen for all of us.

Got a lot of offensive players back, offensive linemen just about all are back. Got a chance to have one of the best O-lines we've ever had.

Defensively we lose some good players. Of course Jadeveon, Chaz Sutton, the two ends, Kelcy Quarles inside, Victor and Jimmy Legree, our two corners. But we got all of our linebackers back, a bunch of guys. So we should have a good defense, hopefully a real good one.

Again, we're looking forward to the season as always. We've been very fortunate the last few years. We've been winning our share of the close games. I think if we're going to have another big year, we have got to win the close games. Last year we won six out of seven that might could have gone either way. When you can do that, that's how you win 11 games.

We're looking forward to it. See what happens.

KEVIN TRAINOR: We'll take questions now.

Q. Can you talk about the differences in building South Carolina and building Florida? Would it be a bigger accomplishment to win an SEC at South Carolina than it was at Florida?

COACH SPURRIER: Well, you know, Florida was the first time ever, according to the history books. They won one that was taken away back in '84, I guess.

But, no, the difference, when I got to Florida in 1990, the team was already there. There was no recruiting to be done for about two years. So the first two years we finished first in SEC, won it. Weren't eligible the first year, but the team was there. They were ready to play, offense, defense. We found Shane Matthews, the quarterback.

The third year we sort of had a bunch of young guys that hadn't played much before. That was one of the most fun years I've had in coaching, '92. We finished 9-4 I think overall.

Alabama beat us in the championship game in that close one here in Birmingham. But those guys really achieved a lot for a couple of true freshmen playing offensive tackle for us, really a bunch of young guys that year. They went on and won a bunch after that also.

South Carolina, we inherited some good players. Not quite near the level that we had at Florida. But that first year was a fun year at South Carolina, it really was. We won a game in Knoxville for the first time in school history. And beat Florida there at home for the first time since joining the conference, I think the first time since 1939, somebody said.

We had some fun wins. But really the recruiting started a lot better I think about four years later. Stephon Gilmore was Mr. Football in South Carolina. Then we got Marcus Lattimore, Jadeveon Clowney, four in a row Mr. Footballs. Then recruiting got a lot better.

We found some boosters, some big-time donors that give over a million bucks. When I got there we had one person to give over a million bucks in the history of the school. Now we have 12 or 13, something like that. Our facilities are really good.

We graduate guys, a bunch of them go to the NFL. They stay out of trouble. We got a good program now. If we continue to work our tails off, hopefully we can keep it up.

Q. You mentioned losing a lot of talent on the D-line. What are you looking to get out of J.T. this year?

COACH SPURRIER: J.T. Surratt probably will be one of our senior captains when we do the voting in mid-season. He's played a lot. I think he started about all the games last year. He's a good, solid inside player.

Defensive end is a position that some guys have got to come around and play.

But J.T.'s a good player, excellent leader. He should have a big season.

Q. You start with A&M, a team with a lot of turnover, new quarterback. Also a team that didn't even have so much as a spring game. How do you prepare for a team that you haven't seen many of anything at all from?

COACH SPURRIER: Oh, you prepare for them about the same way we prepare for all of them. We watch a little tape of their games last year, try to generally get their scheme of things, this, that and the other.

Then we really worry about ourselves more than the opponent. We try to get ourselves ready to play. Try to be prepared for anything and everything. I think that's about what all coaches do.

But again, we probably worry a little bit more about ourselves than we do scheming an opponent. But hopefully we're prepared for almost anything.

Q. You've been in this league a long time. In your experience, what is the key to dealing with a large group of boosters in terms of keeping them happy in terms of access to you and their expectations for the program?

COACH SPURRIER: I think one of the head coach's responsibilities is to get to know some of those big boosters. I certainly have got to know all of ours. In fact, my wife, we have a dinner for all of them each year before the season. I think it's going to be August 15th, two or three weeks before the season starts.

But they're very important. Joe Rice is one of our big donors. I was kidding around with him recently. He took me to the Bahamas on his Jet airplane, on his yacht, pretty good trip.

You're sort of like an owner of the team. The big donors in college are similar to like an owner in the NFL because they put the money up.

The best part of it, they don't tell us what to do, though. They're sort of the owners from a distance. They don't tell you who to play, what plays to call, so forth.

But the big donors are very important, extremely important to all athletic programs. There's no question about that. You got to have the facilities to keep up. Within the last eight, nine years at South Carolina, ours are up there amongst the best now. That's been a big reason for our success.

Q. You're not exactly a fan of the 6-1-1 format, historical rivalry with Texas A&M. Did you know about the pending Alamo Trophy?

COACH SPURRIER: I heard about it. Read about it. Didn't know it's official yet. I'm actually from Tennessee. I always was taught the hero of the Alamo was Davy Crockett, so this was a new one on me.

It's a good story, I'm sure Bonham did some good things. I always thought Davie Crockett was the hero of the Alamo, he and those

33 Tennessee guys that came in there and got killed, so forth (laughter).

So the trophy was a little surprising to me. I'm sure this guy Bonham was a hero and did a lot of good, after I read the story.

If they want to do a trophy for it, that's fine. I didn't know it was official yet. We've got a little trophy with Missouri, because they're Columbia and we're Columbia. They call it the Mayors' Trophy, the mayor of each town. We've been fortunate enough to keep that one at home the last couple of years. I don't know that you can have a trophy for every game. Up in the Big Ten they have a bunch of them, several of them.

If they want to do it, that's fine. I just don't know how many games you're going to have a trophy for as you go through the season.

Q. I know obviously in the past you've had your way of poking at people, having fun with guys. I read where you talked about Saban. You felt like he had sort of underachieved because he had these great recruiting classes but only won two SEC championships. Was that poking fun or do you feel he hasn't taken the maximum out of the players he's got?

COACH SPURRIER: I think they've done extremely well. There's no question about that. I just made a statement that I think they've had five number one recruiting classes out of the last six years, which has got to make him the greatest recruiter in the history of college football.

Arguably, they've got the greatest collection of football players ever assembled for a college team. If the recruiting services are correct, and they're pretty much correct.

So they're the favorites. They're the favorites. There's no question about that. As long as they can recruit like that, they're always going to be the favorites.

I guess fortunately sometimes the team that plays the best is the team that wins instead of maybe who all has the best players.

I just mention that because it is amazing. When I was at Florida, we had two number one classes, 1991, Danny Wuerffel, all those guys, we had a bunch of players come in. The next year the guys said, Coach, you got too many players on Florida, I'm not going to get on the field.

But at Alabama they just keep signing them year after year after year. It's amazing. I give him credit for it. They do it the right way. He runs a good program. It's just amazing to me how

they've been able to stack and keep loading up players every year.

That's what I was just trying to mention. They're going to be the favorites. They got to be the favorites.

Now LSU is pretty good, too. Everybody else recruits very well also. But to be number one that much, that's just sort of amazing to me.

Q. You're about to become the first SEC coach to ever coach 10 years or more at two different schools.

COACH SPURRIER: Hmm (smiling).

Q. Can you talk about why you've lasted this long and why it's still fun? You still enjoy it a lot.

COACH SPURRIER: Yeah, thanks. I do enjoy it. No, I appreciate that because I didn't realize 10 at two places was a record, but I guess it is.

Obviously you never know what your path in life is going to lead to. When I left Florida after 12 years, I thought I was going to coach NFL five or six years and retire to the beach and play golf a bunch and travel around, this, that and the other.

But that was a bad plan. It was. Later you found out, that was not a real good idea. But that's the way I was thinking back then.

After the two years with the team I was with, I said, This isn't for me. The situation I was in was not for me. So the South Carolina opportunity came up and that's how I ended up at South Carolina. Some people ask, How did you end up there? I said, I was available and they were the only ones who offered me a job the end of 2004.

I wanted to coach again. I wanted to go out a winner, not a loser. Fortunately South Carolina was really the best opportunity I could ever ask for. It was a school, you could probably describe their football tradition as mediocre, they had a losing record overall, way under .500 in SEC games. Nowhere to go but up.

Right now we have a great group of assistant coaches. They can go recruit, coach their position, wonderful president, athletic director. It is a wonderful group to work for and be around.

Somebody I read in the paper the other day, rivals.com had us second in the nation in recruiting. Of course, Alabama is number one (laughter). Commitments for next year. Hopefully all these guys will stick.

But it has been interesting. It's really been a fun nine years. Obviously the last three, four years have been a lot more fun.

But that's just the way it's worked out. Yeah, Pat Dooley always told me, I'll coach longer at South Carolina than I did at Florida. He may be right. We don't know yet, but he may be right.

Q. You come to Auburn the end of October. What did you make of Gus' run last year with Auburn, and as they go to repeat, you did it four times in the SEC, how hard is to go back and repeat?

COACH SPURRIER: Well, Gus Malzahn is one of the best coaches in the country, not just the SEC. I think everybody knows that. They didn't win that national championship unless he was there. I think everybody knows that, too.

He's a sharp guy. He and I, I think, are pretty good friends. We don't really look forward to that game. But we got to go in there and give it our best shot.

Auburn is a team that has beaten us a bunch. I think overall in school history we're like 1-9. I'm 0-5 at Auburn being at South Carolina. They have outplayed us, out-coached us and everything.

But we'll go in there with a plan. We'll look forward to trying to upset them on the Plains. But Auburn, what he did last year, was amazing. 0-8 in conference play, win the conference championship. Nobody picked Missouri and Auburn to win the divisions last year. That's why we play the game. We don't know who's going to win 'em.

Q. Early in your tenure at South Carolina, someone asked about the playoff. You said, I don't think I have to worry about that too much right now. As time has gone on at South Carolina, has your perception changed about what is possible, especially considering the success you have had the last couple of years?

COACH SPURRIER: Well, we've won a lot of games, but we still have only won one division, haven't won an SEC. Those are goals that we have a shot at that could happen for the first time in school history.

As far as the playoff, who knows. Shoot, yeah, we would have a chance. Where Auburn came from last year, there's a lot of schools that have a chance to get into it.

But we really don't need to worry about it, none of us have to worry about it in the SEC until the SEC championship game is probably over. So that would be the time to say, Hey, maybe we can make that last four teams and go from there.

I think it is a very good idea to have four. I sort of think maybe someday it will go to eight. But four is pretty good. I know several of those years at Florida, we would have been in the top four even if we had lost to FSU the last game of the season because they were always in the top five in the nation 11 of 12 years that I was at Florida.

We played them last game. One of us sort of knocked each other out of maybe getting in the final game.

But I do like that idea of four teams. It gives a team that maybe has a little tougher schedule a chance to get into it.

Q. That trophy to your right, obviously something you want to get, you haven't been able to get it yet. What is it going to take to get you over the hump at South Carolina the way you were able to do it at Florida?

COACH SPURRIER: We need one of those Eastern Division teams to lose a game. We've gone 6-2 in the conference and beat the division winner three years in a row. Then they go 7-1. All you can do is give Georgia credit and give Missouri credit for doing it also.

What I've also learned at South Carolina, our fans realize there's more to life than winning the SEC championship. They really do. We're in a state with Clemson. Clemson used to pretty much own South Carolina in football, no question about it. We have a state championship trophy. If you ask our fans at South Carolina, I can assure you a majority would say, We would rather beat Clemson than win the SEC. That is how big it is to them, that one game.

Personally I'd rather win the SEC. I don't mind saying that. Personally that's the bigger trophy. But if we're not quite good enough, if it doesn't work out, we're not going to hang our hat and say, We're not going to win the SEC. But there's other things out there.

I've also learned over the last several years when you win that bowl game, life is a lot more comfortable in the off-season. Whoever wins that bowl game, you get ranked in the top 10. We were never in the top 10 till the last three years. Done that every year since we started winning the

bowl games.

Hopefully we can add an SEC championship. I can assure you, I tell those recruits, If you come here, hopefully you'll be on the first-ever SEC championship team ever.

That's still our goal. We haven't quite done it. I think we've been close but not close enough.

Q. When you were at Florida, college football national championships got passed around from conference to conference. In your tenure at South Carolina, one conference has dominated the championship. There are probably a lot of answers to this, but what are a couple of things that have changed about the SEC from your Florida tenure to South Carolina?

COACH SPURRIER: Oh, I don't know how much has changed all that much. We've always had really, really good teams. It seems like when one of our teams gets in the championship game, we've been able to win it. And Auburn almost did it last year, very close.

I don't know how much changed. Obviously players are bigger, stronger, faster all over the country. It's obviously, I think we got more good teams in our conference.

But I tell you what, Stanford and Oregon have been very good. Ohio State. Big Ten Conference has been down a little bit lately, but they're certainly capable of coming back.

But I don't really know the answer. There's a lot of good teams all over the country. They're all capable of beating us.

I think one thing that helps us southern schools is the game is usually played in the south. We don't have those championship games in the snow. A lot of Big Ten teams, the northern teams, play in some bad weather. Playing in the south has got to help us a little bit, or in California.

Q. You mentioned Dylan packing his career into a single season. How patient did he have to be waiting his turn? Starting quarterback as a senior isn't as common anymore.

COACH SPURRIER: It is unusual. Dylan has been very patient. He and Connor Shaw are best of friends all four years. Now he's got it all by himself. It just worked out that way. It just happened that day. Occasionally it does.

He's played a little bit, though. Two years ago we went to Clemson, and Connor had a little

injury of some nature. I said, You're ready to go this week, aren't ya?

He said, Yes, sir.

I said, It's your game. We'll tell the media boys right before the game starts.

He knew it was his game. Played extremely well. I think that was a 27-17 game. He's a good player. He's ready to play.

Q. What is your process when advising players, underclassmen, about whether or not to go to the NFL? Would you change any of the rules or does it work for you the way it is?

COACH SPURRIER: Well, obviously maybe the process of evaluating the players could get a little bit better. Anytime one of them tells me he wants to go pro, I shake his hand, say, Good luck, I'm all for you.

I think the days of a coach talking a kid into staying is not smart. He could get hurt his last year. Marcus Lattimore, after his second big injury, he came to me and said, Coach, I'm going to go pro.

I said, I agree. You need to go pro right now. Don't get that knee healed back up and God forbid get hurt another season when you're not getting paid anything.

All of you know I'm an advocate for giving some expense money to college football and basketball players. Those two sports bring in billions. They deserve a little bit more. I know the commissioner has addressed that. I wish something would happen sooner than we hope it's going to happen.

But that should happen real soon down the road.

Q. Do you like the rules the way they are?

COACH SPURRIER: My personal opinion when a player says, I'm going pro, I shake his hand, say, Good luck. We had two that didn't get drafted, but they were ready to go pro. Once they say they're ready to go pro, that means, I'm tired of school, I want to go get paid to play football. We shake their hand, wish them the best and hopefully they'll have a good pro career.

Q. A&M made a big splash the first two years, won a Heisman, two bowl games. Do you think they have the staying power to be a regular contender in the SEC?

COACH SPURRIER: You know more about it than I do. I'm not from Texas. You're right there watching it. I think it's a shame that Texas and Texas A&M don't play each other, though. I don't mind saying that. Two schools that have been playing for over a hundred years, just because one of them joins another conference, get mad at each other, We're not playing you anymore, we're not playing you anymore. So I don't know. I think it is sad.

Florida plays Florida State. We play Clemson. Georgia plays Georgia Tech. We're in different conferences, but they are in-state rivals. The fans want to see that, to me. They want to see you beat the guys next door, the neighbors. I think it is sad. I know they're not going to play each other. That's just my opinion anyway.

A&M has recruited well, I know that. I read those rankings every year like you do. I think they've been in the top 10 the last three years, maybe top five. They've got ball players. They're going to be ready to play.

Kevin Sumlin has an excellent record as a coach. He's a good negotiator, we know that also, so he's got a good deal (laughter). He's ready to go.

But he's got a good team. We have tremendous respect for Texas A&M.

Q. Your evolvment as a head coach, how important was it to get that early chance in the USFL with the Bandits?

COACH SPURRIER: I think it's very important that I got a chance to be a head coach at age 37. There was two other guys in pro football, 37. One got fired after his first year, one got fired mid-season. I'm pretty fortunate, very blessed still being a head coach, I guess.

The USFL, it was a wonderful experience. The owner, John Massey, a wonderful guy. I mean, he didn't know football, didn't pretend to know football. He said, I'll help you get whatever players you need and away we go.

So I think we were like 9-3 all three years after 12 games. At the end we got some guys hurt, didn't finish very well a couple of years. But the second year we were 14-4. The Birmingham Stallions were 13-3, beat us in the playoffs that year.

Rollie Dotsch was one of the best coaches in football, the Birmingham Stallions. It was a chance to be a head coach. When the league folded, I luckily got another job at Duke. There wasn't anybody after me. Fortunately the Duke job

opened when Steve Sloan went to Alabama to be athletic director. I coached there as an assistant.

That was a wonderful opportunity also to go to Duke as the head coach.

Q. Yesterday Derek Mason said he thinks now is the opportunity for Vanderbilt to compete for an SEC title. Do you think that's realistic? Have you run into Stephen Garcia yet and what you thought of how he looked?

COACH SPURRIER: One of our media guys asked about Stephen. I saw him on TV last night. He was interviewed by our local TV celebrity in Columbia there. He got his long hair back. I said it looked like he had joined Duck Dynasty instead of the media. They assured me he's with the media now.

Stephen is a good guy. We had no problems with Stephen when he was with the team, practicing, the games. All of his issues when he got off the field, around campus, whatever, he had some issues there. Unfortunate, but...

That game against Alabama, he completed 17 out of 20, a 35-21 game when they came in number one in the country, was still a game they still talk about there in Columbia. He had the game of his life. He was National Back of the Week, 17 out of 20, couple touchdown passes, what have you.

He did a lot of good there. We're going to wish him the best. Maybe he's going to have a career in media, I don't know. You know, maybe he's going to keep playing arena ball. I thought he would be real good in the arena ball. Hopefully he'll keep doing that a bit.

Q. And then Vanderbilt?

COACH SPURRIER: Only time will tell. Only time will tell if Vandy can do it. I heard Coach Mason winning nine. But 10, 11, down the road, that is setting your goals high.

But who knows. Who knows if it can or can't be done. I know Wake Forest won an ACC one year. One year we won one there at Duke. That was before FSU got in the league, Miami and all those guys.

But it will be interesting. It will be interesting. I like Derek Mason. I think he's an excellent coach. What they did defensively at Stanford, about as good as anybody in the country. I think he'll do a very good job there.

KEVIN TRAINOR: Coach Spurrier, thank

you.
COACH SPURRIER: Thank you,
everybody.

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