

**July 16, 2014**



An interview with:

## **JUSTIN CONNOLLY**

KEVIN TRAINOR: We're joined by ESPN's Justin Connolly.

JUSTIN CONNOLLY: Good morning. We're going to show you some things this morning, but I'd like to start and just note that I have great admiration and respect for Commissioner Slive. While my remarks this morning will not include any thoughtful quotes from history, I will draw a bit on personal history as he did when he kicked off Media Days this year.

In four weeks on August 14th, we will flip the switch and launch the SEC Network. August 14th already has significance to me personally. It's both my parents' wedding anniversary and also my wife's birthday. But this year I will celebrate both occasions with the debut of the SEC Network.

So today I am fortunate to be representing terrific work being done by over a hundred people from Atlanta to Birmingham to Bristol to Charlotte to New York to all 14 SEC institutions.

I will attempt to channel their passion and their collective energy as I provide a progress report as we approach August 14th.

So first a couple acknowledgments. I want to thank the entire team at the SEC office in Birmingham. It's a fantastic group that has helped guide us as we developed something so exciting.

I'd also like to thank sincerely the SEC fans from across the country. Fans have consistently and loudly expressed support and excitement for this new network.

SEC fans are the inspiration for the network. They are a current and future source of constructive critiques and feedback. I can tell you, as you know well, they are a most vigilant group.

One year ago in this very room we outlined a simple yet lofty vision for the SEC Network. We want to bring the passion and excellence of the SEC on screen and serve SEC fans anytime, anywhere.

In order to achieve that vision, we need to deliver on two critical elements, which I'll discuss this morning. Those two pieces are content and distribution.

While some of this will not be new to you, it does serve to connect the various pieces that will serve as the basis of the network launch.

It starts with recruiting a team of All-Stars, and we have certainly done that. Stephanie Druley, a 23-year veteran of ESPN, leads our production effort. Stephanie has built a team that is the television production equivalent of the 1980 Georgia Bulldogs.

At ESPN they've worked on shows ranging from SportsCenter to College Game Day, the College Football Live, the BCS Championship, and the Baseball and Softball College World Series. The group has won more than 70 national Emmy awards. They know television, they know college sports, and they know the SEC.

A year ago we talked in generalities about the Saturday triple-headers in football. By every measure, we have more than demonstrated our football scheduling commitment both in quality and in quantity.

We will do more than 45 exclusive football games in year one. Over the first 24 days of the football season, the network will carry 18 exclusive games, eight different SEC teams will open their season on the SEC Network, all 14 teams will host a game over the first four weeks. In fact, most teams will appear on the SEC Network twice before we end September.

Our strength of schedule and production expertise is matched only by the roster of on-air talent that will headline our football coverage. It's an impressive and diverse mix of legends, veterans and rookies.

Andre Ware, Joe Tessitore, Tim Tebow, Maria Taylor, Matt Stinchcomb, Marcus Spears, Jesse Palmer, Dari Nowkhah, Dave Neal, Brent Musburger, Booger McFarland, Greg McElroy, Kaylee Hartung, Tom Hart, Paul Finebaum and Tony Barnhart.

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team in America. Our analysts alone have compiled two Super Bowl rings, two Heisman Trophy winners, four National Championships, five NFL first-round picks, six first-team All-American awards, six SEC Football Championships, and 8-All-SEC first team honors.

We will frame the content with fresh and dynamic graphics and animation packages. The network will have a distinctive look and feel while still maintaining the quality and creativity that is ESPN's signature.

Our studio in Charlotte will serve as the hub for our news coverage. Dari Nowkhah and Maria Taylor will be our 1-2 punch for our signature news and information program which we title SEC Now.

SEC Now will air five days per week. We will also be televising the Paul Finebaum radio show from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. east. Paul's show will continue to offer us unique opportunities to engage a wide variety of perspectives from coaches to analysts to some of the most colorful fans in the conference.

Let's take a look at some highlights from a typical week. We've talked about Paul's show and SEC Now.

SEC in 60 is an enhanced game recap vehicle to provide the best behind-the-scenes coverage from games from the previous week.

Film Room will provide insights and analysis directly from an SEC coach who will rotate from week-to-week in helping break down past games from past games.

SEC Storied is our long feature brand. SEC Walkthrough will provide context and perspective on the upcoming matchup during the football season.

On weekends we've talked about SEC Nation and we've talked about the full complement of games. We're also going to provide halftime coverage with SEC Now. We'll do SEC Scoreboard which will recap a total of the day's games from each Saturday. We'll do an SEC Game of the week which will highlight the most exciting game from that previous Saturday. SEC Rewind will dip into the vault to find classic games from past seasons of SEC action.

Well, this is representative of the core programs staples. We will also take advantage of impromptu content opportunities and seasonal specials like the 14 different football preview shows that will run this August.

While it gets buried at Football Media Days, this is not a network dedicated or reliant



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solely on football. We will cover every SEC sport. During our launch week, we will air coverage from the Kentucky men's basketball Big Blue Bahamas Tour, and it's just one example.

Our fall schedule will be punctuated by women's soccer and women's volleyball. We will air 65 games across those two sports on the television network.

There is also great engagement and support for the digital event production across each campus. A year ago we were just completing our technical surveys of each campus. This past winter and spring, we tested production capabilities at 12 of the 14 schools. The other two schools were building their production capabilities that will be available when we launch.

It's an impressive exercise which will help foster both communication and cooperation.

We've also identified our digital live event schedule for the fall. The lineup includes over 200 exclusive soccer and volleyball events. Thanks to each school for embracing the effort thus far. We are on track to surpass our original goal of 550 digital events by a wide margin.

Thanks to the SEC Network, across TV and digital, fans will be able to see every men's and women's college basketball game from the SEC, every baseball and softball conference game and every conference gymnastics meet. It's incredible.

For subscribers to the network, we will make every SEC Network event available on the WatchESPN application. This helps aggregate all of the SEC action from both the SEC Network and all other ESPN platforms into a single destination.

This is a sportsfan's paradise and the most fan-friendly approach in a digital environment.

Finally on the content side. We've consistently noted that storytelling would be a point of differentiation for us. Features of all lengths and subject matter will texture the network. The expansion of our long form feature brand SEC Storied has been a focus for our ESPN films team. We will debut four films over the first four weeks of the network.

Let's get a flavor of the SEC Storied brand and what we have in the queue.

(Video Shown.)

JUSTIN CONNOLLY: So later tonight

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many of you will have a chance to see an expanded segment of the Gaines Mullins project which is entitled It's Time. It's a powerful story and represents the types of story we aspire to tell on this network.

So let's move to the second topic, distribution.

Well, I don't have sexy highlight videos or graphics packages, this component is critical to success. Judging by the number of distribution questions from this group, I think everyone appreciates its importance.

A year ago I mentioned that success in this area would be the product of both patience and persistence, plotting and methodical distribution negotiation do not track the hyperactive news cycle. Thankfully our skilled distribution team continues to work tirelessly in this area.

Last week we announced the addition of Cox Communications to our growing providers. We have since added two smaller cooperative deals, for all of these distributors realize their customers need this network. We now have six deals completed, all shapes and sizes, DISH, U-verse, the NRTC, the NTTCC, PTC Communications, Cox Communications, and Google Fiber. Across the country, all fans have options to access the SEC Network.

This is an incredible start and a great feat to achieve four weeks prior to launch. Four weeks is also a long time in the distribution world, especially when a network of this scope is launching.

Accordingly, our push for distribution continues. We're encouraged by our ongoing conversations and discussions and we will provide updates as the list of partners grows.

The outpouring of support from fans on social media and calls to their providers has most certainly helped. Again today fans can let their television providers know that they want the SEC Network. They can call them directly, tweet them, go to getSECnetwork.com. We have more work to do on distribution and with the ongoing support and help of SEC fans, we anticipate continued success in this area.

As you can see with four weeks until launch, we've built an incredible foundation of both content and distribution. Much work remains prior to launch and after we go live.

In reality, the launch will be just the beginning of a constant process of evolving and further developing our network, which again is aimed at bringing the passion and excellence of

the SEC on screen and serving SEC fans anytime, anywhere.

So here is to good health and great success for all 14 SEC football teams in the upcoming seasons.

Many thanks for your time this morning. And one last plug. Your opportunity to take it all in begins at 6 p.m. east, 5 p.m. central on Thursday, August 14th.

Thank you.

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